Philosophical Reflections on

Bhima Bhoi
and
Mahima Dharma

Edited by

Prof. Harischandra Sahoo



Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS)
Deemed to be University
Bhubaneswar

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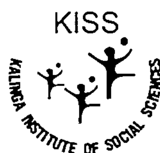
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Foreword



Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS) is a unique institution of its kind, established in 1993 to promote and empower marginalized tribal students by imparting free residential education along with other facilities. KISS was granted Deemed to be University status U/S 3 of UGC Act 1956 in the year 2017. The University has instituted seven Research Chairs in the name of illustrious sons of the soil like Utkal Gourab Madhusudan Das, Utkalmani Gopabandhu Das, Santhakabi Bhima Bhoi, Pravada Purusha Biju Pattnaik, Sahid Laxman Naik, Bhagwan Birsha Munda and Baba Sahib Bhimrao Ambedkar.

It is a matter of great pride that Santhakabi Bhima Bhoi Research Chair has been actively engaged in organizing seminars, guiding research scholars and other research activities in collaboration with Bhima Bhoi Research Chair, Gangadhar Meher University, Sambalpur for the recognition and appreciation of works of Bhima Bhoi in national and international level.

I am happy to learn that on behalf of the Bhima Bhoi Research Chair, the second edited volume, containing research articles of reputed scholars entitled Philosophical Reflections on Bhima Bhoi and Mahima Dharma is going to be publishd soon by KISS Deemed to be University.

I congratulate Prof. Harischandra Sahoo for his sincere efforts and I wish that the publication will be appreciated by the followers of Bhima Bhoi.

(Achyuta Samanta)
Founder, KIIT & KISS

KISS
KALINGA INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Prof. Deepak Kumar Behera
Vice-Chancellor

Preface



Bhima Bhoi, the 19th Century tribal saint-poet, was the propagator of Mahima Dharma, a form of spiritual humanism. Under the tutelage of Mahima Swain, he developed a philosophical system of Sunyavada and formulated a radical social programme of combat against casteism in orthodox Hindu society and preached for social justice for the oppressed and poor masses. The Bhima Bhoi Research Chair, instituted in KISS Deemed to be University, has undertaken research projects on Bhima Bhoi and Mahima Dharma, and also organized seminars and symposia. It has published books, guided research scholars and translated the works of Bhima Bhoi in collaboration with the Bhima Bhoi Research Chair, Gangadhar Meher University, Sambalpur.

It gives me immense pleasure to announce that KISS Deemed to be University is going to publish the second edited volume entitled Philosophical Reflections on Bhima Bhoi and Mahima Dharma containing the articles by eminent scholars.

I congratulate Dr. Harischandra Sahoo, Professor of Bhima Bhoi Research Chair and hope that the volume will be well appreciated by Bhima Bhoi scholars, researchers and general readers .

DK Behera.

(Prof. Deepak Kumar Behera)
Vice-Chancellor

Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS)
Deemed to be University



ଗଙ୍ଗାଧର ମେହେର ବିଶ୍ୱବିଦ୍ୟାଳୟ
GANGADHAR MEHER UNIVERSITY
Amruta Vihar, Sambalpur - 768004 (Odisha)



Prof. N. Nagaraju
Vice-Chancellor

Message

I am happy to know that, Bhima Bhoi Research Chair, Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences, Deemed to be University is going to bring out the second volume titled, Philosophical Reflections on Blzima Bhoi and Mahima Dharma with contributions from noted scholars.

Reading Bhima Bhoi or listening to His Bhajans is a humbling experience. Complex philosophical concepts are rendered into simple songs with universal appeal. Ethical codes for the mendicants of the order and householders clearly celebrate brotherhood and renunciation. A book highlighting these values is a felt need. Hope the efforts of Dr. Harish Chandra Sahoo will answer the need.

I wish the publication a success.

N. Nagaraju 11.2.22

(Prof. N. Nagaraju)

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Editorial

The book is a collection of papers by erudite scholars who have an extensive and critical study of the different aspects of the philosophy of Bhima Bhoi. They have presented their views how philosophy of Bhima Bhoi is culmination of Buddhism, *Advaita Vedānta*, *Nātha Cult*, *Dhrama Cult*, *Panchasakhā* Philosophy on the nature of reality, method of *sādhanā*, social philosophy and spiritual humanism. Though Bhima Bhoi was not a system-builder in philosophy in technical sense of the term but one can check out his philosophy by studying his *bhajanas* where there is clear articulation of different aspects of his philosophy. He was not mearly a social reformer but a diehard revolutionary who has courageously and vehemently criticised the caste system, dogmatic ritualism, idol-worship, misconception about the nature of man, ultimate reality and the world. His philosophy transcends sectarianism and religious fundamentalism, and for sending a message of world-view for the elites and non-elites that each man is potentially divine and can attain perfection, if the proper path is followed in spiritual *sādhanā*.

His writings and messages are meant for common man, therefore as a saint like Kabir, Nānak, Dādu, Panchasakhas, he expressed it in vernacular language that can be understood by all. He is appropriately called as a saint because there is a difference between *sādhu* and *saint*. A sādhu aspires for his own salvation but a saint is one who makes efforts for salvation of all at the cost of his own salvation.

The next issue that generally crops up is, whether he is a poet or a philosopher? Generally he is understood as a poet because he has composed many poems. But a deep study reveals that his creativity is not to show his literary excellence but it is outpouring of his feeling of his heart having a spiritual insight of removal of suffering of man from the riddle of life by proper understanding of divine spark in man. Therefore, first he is a philosopher, then a poet. His poems are written in such lucid, simple and heart touching style so as to explain the intricate philosophical concepts which can be understood by non-intellectual common man with ease.

His concept of reality is expressed by three terms *Śūnya, Mahima* and *Alekha*. In Bhima Bhoi's Philosophy, *Śūnya* is not an abstract concept but concrete reality which can be described by intellectual categorisation or conceptualization. It shall be a mistaken view, if we treat *Śūnya* as void or nothingness. He is self-complete and does not require any qualities, therefore Bhima Bhoi says He is Purna *Brahma*.

Mahima and *Alekha* are the denotative and connotative aspect of the same reality. *Alekha* literally means that which cannot be described in any form or finite structure. The infinity of *Alekha* eludes the grasps of language. Poets and philosophers tried their best to write the attributes of the reality, therefore, the only option left for them is to describe him as *Alekha*.

As he is *Alekha*, he is called *mahima* which means the glory, the divine and the highest. Bhima Bhoi identifies *mahima* as *dharma*. *Mahima* is so compassionate and gracious that the devotee, who prays *mahima*, becomes *Brahman* and therefore, he gets redemption from worldly suffering.

Bhima Bhoi accepts *piṇḍa-brahmāṇḍa* identity which means that there is no difference between the individual self and the world. This doctrine is also found in *Nātha dharma* and Tantric Buddhism. Following *piṇḍa-brahmāṇḍa* theory Bhima Bhoi says that human body is the seat of the divinity which helps the human being to attain spiritual perfection. As human being is the potential womb of divine qualities. *Sadjñāna* is possible through the knowledge of the body.

Regarding the moral practices or *sādhanā*, Bhima Bhoi says that as the ultimate reality is *niṣkāma,* the different path leading to it must be *niṣkāma*. So he uses the term *niṣkāma karma, niṣkāma Jñāna* and *niṣkāma bhakti* which are not independent paths but are blended together. Bhima Bhoi is opposed to *suddha bhakti* of Goudiya Vaishnava and upholds *Jñāna – misra bhakti*. He says that without *Jñāna, bhakti* is mere sentimentality and without bhakti, *Jñāna* is mere information. The devotee must have jnana regarding *Alekhapurursa*. It is *Jñāna* which generates *bhakti* which follows spontaneously from a *brahmajñāni.*

The mission of Bhima Bhoi was to established a class-less, caste-less society and his philosophy is to explain a way of life not meant for a particular sector or group but for all pleading for spiritual humanism. This was necessary because Bhima Bhoi appeared at a time where the human civilization was at cross roads and there was degeneration of values. He fought for the cause of women who were under subjugation and were prevented from spiritual *sādhanā*. His voice was to give equal opportunity to woman for complete unfoldment of their personality. The values envisaged by Bhima Bhoi is not restricted to humans but to all beings having a vision of respecting all as manifestation of spiritual reality. His humanism transcends human interests and embraces all by cosmic love. His concern for suffering of beings is not his theoretical conviction of unity but from the innermost core of his heart. His agony finds classic expression when he prays the Lord that he is no more able to withstand the suffering beings around him, so he is prepared to court condemnation in hell in lieu of upliftment of all.

The above editorial remark is simply a summarized view on the main theme of the papers contributed by the authors. I am grateful to all contributors in general who have been very kind enough to present their insights in philosophy of Bhima Bhoi and Mr. Johannes Beltz and Rights Department of Oxford University Press (OUP), New Delhi, Prof. Ishita Banerjee-Dube and SUNY Press, Albani, Mukti Lakhi Mangahram, Economic and Political Weekly, Mumbai in particular for sending their papers despite their busy schedule and kind permission to republish their articles in this volume. I express my deep sense of gratitude to Prof. Achyuta Samanta, the founder of KIIT and KISS, Prof. Deepak Kumar Behera, Vice-Chancellor, KISS University, Dr. Prasanta Kumar Routray, Registrar, KISS DU and Prof. Ashok Kumar Mohapatra, Senior Professor of English who have been the guiding spirit for publication of this volume by giving valuable suggestions and remarks. My effort will be amply rewarded, if this volume is appreciated by research scholars, teachers and general readers.

Harischandra Sahoo
Editor

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CONTENTS

Bhima Bhoi
The Making of a Modern Saint*

Johannes Beltz

Bhima Bhoi is one of Orissa's most interesting literary and religious figures of the nineteenth century.[1] He was a disciple of Mahima Gosain, the legendary founder of the Mahima Dharma movement.[2] As the prominent historian Chittaranjan Das (1951: 160) rightly pointed out, 'Although Mahima Gosain was the founder of Mahima Dharma, it was really the works of Bhima Bhoi, the blind poet, that brought home to all people the essence and excellence of the new doctrine'. Indeed Bhima Bhoi's importance should not be underestimated. The major part of the popular devotional poetry that characterizes Mahima Dharma is attributed to him,[3] and as a matter of fact more than one critic has taken him not only to be the successor of Mahima Gosain but also to be the actual propagator of Mahima Dharma.[4] Furthermore Bhima Bhoi protested against almost everything that generally characterizes 'orthodox' Hinduism, that is the reference to the Veda as a sacred scripture, idol worship, temple cult, pilgrimage, and Brahmin priesthood.[5]

SOURCES AND FIELDWORK

Bhima Bhoi's significance is contrasted by the absence of reliable documents about him.[6] He did not expose any autobiographical details in his writings and the very few references about his life are difficult to understand, and allow contradictory interpretations. The secondary sources such as newspapers and administrative reports are also quite contradictory and confusing.[7] However, we do possess a large number of stories and legends which are orally transmitted and widely circulated. How to deal with this kind of texts? In some of the existing biographies about Bhima Bhoi,

* (This article is a reprint of "Bhima Bhoi: The making of a modern saint", in: A. Copley (ed.) Hindu Nationalism and Religious Reform Movements, New Delhi: OUP 2003, pp. 230-253.)

they are quoted without inquiring into their legendary character. In others they are objected to because they do not contain any 'true fact' and are as such without any historical value. I believe these conclusions are misguided when it comes to understanding the meaning and significance of Bhima Bhoi. In fact I decided to systematically collect all those legends and strange stories which are absent in 'scholarly' books. It goes without saying, however, that these stories tell us more about how Bhima Bhoi is imagined and less about him as an authentic historical person. These texts are hagiographic documents and should be valued as such.[8] Thus, this essay is not a historical study about the person who was Bhima Bhoi but rather discusses the impact which he had, and still has today. In other words, starting from the idea that saints are not born but made, I want to look into the complex process of constructing a religious biography. My interest lies in the challenge Bhima Bhoi presented, and still presents for the people who narrate his life story.[9]

Before exposing the many and contradictory ways in which Bhima Bhoi is represented, my fieldwork should be mentioned. From 2000 to 2001 I visited several places in western Orissa which have special links with Bhima Bhoi-Khaliapali, Jatasinga. Kankanpada, and Kandhara. Interviews were conducted among the ascetics of the *Balkaladhari* and the *Kaupinadhari* order, as well as among the lay people. It seems that in western Orissa Mahima Dharma is very popular among the so-called downtrodden communities, and especially among the 'Untouchable' Ganda-Panas. However, people from other communities and higher social strata are also equally attracted to it. I met devotees who are carpenters (*Khabala*), farmers (*Chasa*), oil makers (*Teli*), fisherman, milkman, and weavers (*Meher*). It is reported that even brahmins have accepted this religion; this was an information that I was not able to verify.

I did not interact exclusively with initiated members of the Mhima Dharma sect. The circulated stories of Bhima Bhoi break the boundaries and cross all frontiers of caste and creed in villages and towns. One has to keep in mind that his poems are very popular, not recited by professional artists only.[10] His

bhajanas (devotional songs) are sung at many occasions, and his *malikas* (prophecies) are widely known.[11] There is something more remarkable about his *bhajanas*; it is said that they possess healing powers. People have been cured from diseases, snakebites, and possession of evil spirits. It seems that by reciting them and by praying to Mahima Alekha, barren women can get pregnant. Bhima Bhoi has also become an object of intellectual discussion. During the last decades he has been politically appropriated as a great freedom fighter and a vehement critic of communalism. He is cast as the forerunner of women's emancipation and a great protagonist of Oriya language. He manifests Orissa's contribution to the Indian culture heritage. For instance, when the Sahitya Akademi asked for a poetic passage from each of the fourteen Indian languages, a couplet of Bhima Bhoi's *Stuticintamani* was chosen.[12] The number of associations, schools and colleges which are operating in Orissa in the name of Bhima Bhoi are numerous, and several research institutes are created in his name.

As mentioned above, my sources consist of printed books and booklets as well as interviews; therefore a continuity between literature and oral narration may be presupposed. I do consider both categories of texts as equal interesting and authentic. It should be recalled in our analysis that the texts about Bhima Bhoi's life are collected from a variety of people with different social and political backgrounds. The context of each of these texts is specific and requires proper understanding. But in their diversity, all texts are comparable. They imagine the life of Bhima Bhoi and give a coherent sense to it. Beyond their specific context, common topics can be extrapolated and cultural patterns analyzed. In this sense my essay is open for further research on hagiography, biography, and autobiographies in an inter-cultural and comparative perspective.

BHIMA BHOI'S ORIGIN

Hagiographies usually answer the question of the origin of their hero. Let us accept that Bhima Bhoi was a historic person and that he was born in the middle of the nineteenth century. We cannot provide the exact year because the definite answer is not

only outside our field of investigation, but also irrelevant to our research. Bhima Bhoi's origin is as mysterious as his life. Let us quote from his magnum opus *Stuticintamani*. Bhima Bhoi repeatedly claims here to originate from a poor Kandha family (that means he is a tribal). He further reports that his father died when he was born. He seems to have lost his mother also, since he calls himself an orphan. The little Bhima Bhoi had therefore to start working at a very young age:

I have no friends nor brothers, no mother or father to save me from the troubles and sorrow. I have no well-wisher nor relations, I am a helpless orphan creature.[13]

Or:

My father left me from the time of birth keeping me without support in desperate condition. How could I get food and enjoyment easily if so desired, [...] From the age of twelve I had to spend days tending cattle in the forest.[14]

However, one should keep in mind that the context of these verses indicates an explicit religious meaning. Bhima Bhoi is not reciting biographical data but talks about his guru. He describes his painful existence and asks the guru to save him from that. Bhima Bhoi's major concern is his sorrow and his salvation. Again and again, he narrates how he suffered in his childhood and how he met his guru at the age of four.[15]

One could ask if Bhima Bhoi is not hiding origins voluntarily. As a true mystic he would have no interest in revealing his family background. Indeed, there are hardly more biographical references in his other poetic creations. The absence of authentic bio-data is contrasted by numerous miraculous 'birth stories'. In almost all villages in the region of Kandhara and Redhakhol, stories circulate. One of them reads:

There was a man called Danara Bhoi and he was Kandha. Once he went into the forest in search of some wood and found an abandoned male child on a lotus leaf. He gave the child to his wife who was unable to conceive, and they took care of him.

This is the simplest version of the event, and also very straight

because no fantastic religious topics appear. It sounds as if the story could really have happened. Some variations affirm that Bhima Bhoi was an abandoned, illegitimate child. But in all varieties, a consensus exists on the fact that he was found in a palm grove and that his adoptive parents were kandhas, that is, tribals. The names of his adoptive parents may differ, but it is always a barren woman who needs a child. In some stories a divine element clearly appears: Mahima Gosain comes to know about the pain of the childless Kandha couple and decides to help. The crucial issue remains that Bhima Bhoi has no 'real' parents. On certain occasions I was told the Bhima's birth happened in the same way as Krishna's did, that is, as a divine emanation. The fact that Bhima Bhoi has no biological parents reinforces his holy character.

The divine origin of Bhima Bhoi is reaffirmed and canonized by a current which places Bhima Bhoi in the *pancashakha* tradition.[16] According to this idea. Bhima Bhoi's appearance was predicted by Achyutananda Das, the famous Oriya poet of the fifteenth century. In his *Kalpa Samhita*, he is quoted to have said that Radha would take birth again in the world and will be called Bhima Bhoi. It was also said that she would be reborn in a Kandha family and that she would have poetic talent. Whilst this idea may be of recent origin, it is nonetheless interesting for our investigation. Through this prediction Bhima Bhoi is integrated into the dominant Vaishnava tradition. What is even more interesting is the fact that this reappropriation has worked very successfully. I was told many times during my interviews that Mahima Gosain and Bhima Bhoi form a couple, like Krishna and Radha. Bhima Bhoi was the Radha of divine eternity; he never came out of woman's womb (*ajonisambhuta*). Certain *bhaktas* (devotees) declare that Bhima Bhoi was the *avatara* (incarnation) of Bhagavan. Others claim that his father was Alekha Swami. To repeat once again, this statement does not inform us about the real origin of Bhima Bhoi, but rather shows us the manner in which his followers revered him as a divine being.

In general, Bhina Bhoi's poor social background is positively recognized. It culminates in the statement that although born in a

poor Kandha family, he still rose to a place of power and praise because of his intelligence. Bhima Bhoi becomes a spiritual guide, a model to follow. In fact, Bhima Bhoi is envisioned as a tribal poet. It is said that in Orissa prior to his coming, only brahmins were recognized as poets, and that Mahima Gosain changed that state of affairs by making Bhima Bhoi the first *Adivasi* poet. This statement ignores that Sarala Das, the author of the Oriya version of the Mahabharata, was a *shudra*. Whether a historical fact or not, Bhima Bhoi is seen as a challenge to the brahmin hegemony. However, one has to keep in mind that this claim is made by non-Adivasis.[17] Perhaps the literacy elite promote Bhima Bhoi's tribal background to integrate the tribals into the mainstream? One could consider this discourse also as an attempt to reappropriate Bhima Bhoi as an agent for the ongoing Hinduization of autonomous tribal cultures. Being originally a tribal, he becomes the representative of a modern and reformed Hinduism.

It is interesting that Bhima Bhoi also appears as the voice of the subaltern and the underprivileged. An important part of the Ganda-Panas, a caste of so-called 'untouchables' from western Orissa converted to Mahima Dhrma and took Bhima Bhoi s a symbol of their own.[18] Bhima Bhoi is seen as one of their own, a poor and a low-caste man. He is praised as the prophet of the dalits affirming their envy of social recognition. Through him, a universal brotherhood is formulated: the 'untouchables' are also Hindus. And they practise the 'true' Hinduism without idols because they know the sacred but hidden meaning of the Vedas.

But again this discourse is contested (whenever the caste factor enters the discussion, contradictory stories are bound to appear). Indeed, some intellectuals declare that Bhima Bhoi although raised as a tribal, was a brahmin by birth. This claim is based on the stereotype that only brahmins were able to write literature and talk about religious matters. How could a tribal compose such beautiful songs? In order to prove his noble birth, it is recalled that Bhima Bhoi had a fair complexion. Others are more modest in their claims by recognizing that he probably was not born as a brahmin but that he was, at least, as educated as brahmin. By

saying this, the supremacy of brahmins is still safeguarded. The debate indicates clearly a social conflict among the so-called higher and lower castes.

It is not only the birth and the social background which are controversially discussed. There is a long-standing debate amongst Indian scholars about the question of where Bhima Bhoi was really born. Joranda, Gramadiha, Jatasinga, Kamrapali, and Kumarkeli are all places where the local people are able to show the lotus pond where the little Bhima Bhoi was found. This is not the place to list or discuss such theories. This question is, again, outside our area of investigation. But I would like to add that this problem does not represent a mere abstract debate. There exists a dynamic competition between different villages, local persons, and institutions; persons develop new stories about the *janmasthana* (birthplace) of Bhima Bhoi, and they are keen to defend their ideas against others. So-called 'scientific' proofs are constructed, schools are named after him, and his statues are erected in order to promote local interests. The person of Bhima Bhoi is imagined and appropriated in many contexts and with diverse intentions. It is interesting to observe how the different positions are negotiated.

THE BLIND POET

Though Bhima Bhoi never presented himself as blind person, there exists a hagiographic tradition which declares him blind. Among scholars, contradictory opinions and stories circulate about Bhima Bhoi's blindness.[19] As I have argued already in the introduction of this essay, it is not my aim to discover the 'historic' Bhima Bhoi, that is the person he was in reality. I think that the question of whether he was really blind or not is beyond my field of investigation. However, one should keep in mind that in his compositions, no reference is made to a physical handicap. The few passages where he speaks about blindness could be understood as metaphors: Bhima Bhoi thinks of himself as blind without his guru. Furthermore, he often uses verbs of vision. But instead of arguing why he was not blind, let us adopt another perspective. I suggest taking the account of his blindness as

interesting texts to look into. In other words, I suggest looking at his blindness in terms of a hagiographic topic.

His blindness, being without any doubt an important motif of his life story, is generally connected to his first meeting with Mahima Gosain. Keeping in mind the importance of the first encounter between the guru and *shishya* (disciple) in Indian hagiographic writing, let me quote this story. According to Biswanath Baba (1991: 53), the story of how Mahima Swami (Prabhu), who was accompanied by Govinda Baba, came to meet Bhima Bhoi is as follows:

Both the preceptor and his disciple reached the village Gramadiha, which is situated near Redhakhol, in the middle of the night. In front of the door of Bhima Bhoi's house, Swami called: 'Bhima Bhoi!' Bhima Bhoi heard the voice and was surprised. He replied, 'who are you? Why are you calling me in the middle of the night?' Hearing this answer from Bhima Bhoi, Prabhu replied, 'We have reached here because of your past virtues. Come quickly!' Hearing this, Bhima Bhoi replied, 'if you have reached here due to my past virtues, then give me the power of vision. I'm blind. If you do so, I'll be informed about by virtues'. Prabhu commanded, 'Receive the power of seeing. Knowing about the miraculous deeds of Swami, he opened the door immediately and went outside. He found the preceptor and his disciple both waiting near the door just like the sun and the moon. Bhima Bhoi prostrated in front of the preceptor and his disciple. Prabhu blessed Bhima by laying his hand on Bhima's head. Then he ordered, 'O Bhima, get up!' According to his order he got up and offered prayers with folded hands. Then he asked: 'O Prabhu, for what reason have you appeared here so suddenly? Please, command kindly and mercifully to the wretched.' Prabhu replied, 'Prabhu has miraculously incarnated in a bodily from in order to preach the Satya Mahima Dharma in the present Kaliyuga. You will be initiated into this dharma.' [...] After that, Mahima Swami clapped his hands thrice on the head of the Bhima Bhoi and transferred on him the gift of poetry. This gift would automatically develop from his inner heart in order to spread the glory of the Satya Mahima Dharma. Bhima Bhoi was

overwhelmed with joy and offered *saran* at the feet of Swami. He asked him, 'Prabhu, I have seen your feet because you have given me the power of vision. I do not want to see the worldly objects with that outer eye. Prabhu bless me to become unable to see these outer objects.' Swami replied, 'You will get back to your previous stage.'

Bhima Bhoi is presented in this story as a mere disciple of Mahima Gosain. He is not a genuine poet but a servant who has to write what his guru will tell him. Bhima Bhoi resists and states his inability to do this. But Mahima Gosain does not accept his excuses and orders him to fulfil his mission. This is, again a common topic which can be found in other comparable hagiographies: the saint is always overwhelmed by the presence of his guru, often he refuses to serve him because he finds it too difficult. In fact, in Biswanath Baba's story, Bhima Bhoi's blindness is used to underline the ultimate authority of Mahima Gosain. Bhima Bhoi's poetic creativity and autonomy are annihilated. He personally has nothing to say. He is just the pen in the hand of his guru.

Interestingly, Biswanath Baba (1991 : 56) tells another story about Bhima Bhoi composing his first poetry. It was at the time when Bhima Bhoi was keeping cattle near Redhakhol. One day, he fell into an old and broken well in Kandhara. Though people tried to help him, he refused to come out. He stayed in the well and told the people that the one who would save him would be the same as the one who had brought him there. So it happened. In the night, he saw a big foot, took it and was drawn out the well. It is said that from this moment on Bhima Bhoi composed poetry. To my knowledge it is only Biswanath Baba who combined the well story with Bhima Bhoi's first poems. Usually the story is that Bhima Bhoi fell into the well and was saved by Mahima Swami. The fall is seen as a proof of Bhima Bhoi's faith in his guru.

In adition to Biswanath Baba's narrative, I would like to refer to the story of Sur Das, the blind Braj poet. The comparison with Bhima Bhoi is doubly interesting because Sur Das also falls into a well and voluntarily renounces the return of his vision. The choice of blindness strikes a parallel with the story of Bhima

Bhoi. Both stories seem to be so similar because we are in the midst of hagiographies where blindness is a religious issue. But if it seems likely that Sur Das not blind at all- as John Stratton Hawley suggests- what does that mean? If blindness is such an important religious topic, what is the inherent significance of it? Let us quote Hawley (1984: 15) who considers that the account of Sur's blindness 'not only preserves the purity of vision upon which so much hinges in the Verta, but strengthens it: even when Sur sees, he sees nothing but Krishna.'

Let us mention the concept of *darshan* and its significance in Hinduism. The 'look' is the core in the relationship between the deity and the devotee. The eye is a testimony of truth but is, after all, also negligible. The saint who, like God, knows everything does not need to look. Axel Michaels (1998: 257) writes: Blindness can be higher knowledge. The visible things can be illusion…'. The poets of the *nirguna-bhakti* tradition think that God is an its essence without from and quality (*nirguna, nirakara*). Accordingly then; the visible world is only illusion! In the words of Michaels (1998: 257): 'The true understanding does not need eyes but knowledge and inner vision'.

Given such an insight we may now have gained a better understanding of the significance of Bhima Bhoi's blindness. I am proposing that it may be considered to be normative within the sphere that is traditionally assigned to rare spiritual humility. In this sense, the blind Bhima Bhoi fits well into the Indian canon of hagiography. His blindness is less an attribute which refers to his physical outlook, or to his physical abilities, than the consequence of his religious attitude. He is preaching the void, the empty. God has no form, and there is no idol to worship. How can this be better illustrated than by the image of Bhima Bhoi as a blind poet? It could also be argued that his blindness permits him to concentrate on god. Sight would allow him to witness other things which may spoil him. The blindness is the culminating point in the narrative about the holy Bhima Bhoi, conveying the intensity of his love for God.

However, we have to understand that the people who imagine Bhima Bhoi as blind do not adhere to the 'rationalistic' discourse

on Bhima Bhoi that is typical for the intellectual elite who promote him as a social revolutionary. In the latter case, he is depicted as watching the world with open and attentive eyes. His blindness is read as metaphor of spirituality. Bhima sees what happens around him as being part and parcel of this world. He saw the nature, the human injustice, the social inequalities, the poverty, and all the problems which humans faced in their lifetime. His altruism, his social engagement are imagined as a reaction to what he saw. It could be that this discourse is quite recent and the result of a more rationalistic appropriation of Bhima Bhoi. This indicates that there is a changing emphasis in the perception of this person.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF A SOCIAL REFORMER

It is said that Bhima Bhoi revolted against all kinds of social evils. He questioned local hierarchies, kings, Brahmins, and the traditional role of women. Bhima Bhoi is depicted as the first social revolutionary of modern Orissa. He fought against the British and tried his best to reform Indian society. Bhima Bhoi is further imagined as a saint who sacrificed his personal life for the well-being of other people. He did not renounce his noble mission when people burned down his house, or threw stones at him, or spat at him and threatened him with death. He was driven out of his village and imprisoned several times.[20]

Bhima Bhoi is believed to have questioned the authority of local kings. One old man of the Kankanpara village told me that the Raja Niladri Singh Deo of Sonepur wanted Bhima Bhoi to pass an ordeal through fire in order to test his holiness. But the Raja died of a snakebite the night before the ordeal was to take place. Bhima Bhoi's integrity as a holy man could not be questioned. It is also said that the attempt of the king to test the holiness of Bhima Bhoi had caused an everlasting malediction of the royal family of Sonepur. Due to this evil king, the family had to abdicate and the royal palace, being abandoned by his owners, was destroyed.

It is also said that Bhima Bhoi opposed caste distinctions (*jatigata vibheda*) and accepted disciples from all communities, even untouchables. According to him there is only one caste, that is, humanity (*manavajati*).[21] In other words, there are only men and

women. It is often said that his criticism of caste provoked people to place sanctions on him. They could not bear he accepted people from all communities and that he treated them equally. There is a related story in which Bhima Bhoi was beaten up and thrown into the well in Kandhara because he was acting against the *jatikuladharma*. Let us recall that Biswanath Baba (1991: 56) gave a rather different interpretation of the event. According to him, the well story narrates how Bhima Bhoi came to write his first poetry. Again we can see that events and narrative elements can vary and can be used on more occasions that one. In other words, literary topics and motifs can be combined and used in many ways, according to the communicational context in which the narrative is situated. Be it an accident or a royal punishment, there exists today a well in Kandhara which is remembered as the place were Bhima Bhoi was saved by his guru. The old structure has recently been replaced by an enormous concrete construction. With the help of public money, a huge memorial has been erected in order to commemorate the incident. The villagers proudly take the visitors to the well; regular festivals are organized where the obligatory procession path incorporates a trip around the well. Thus, the place of Kandhara has been integrated into the sacred geography of Mahima Dhrma.

Bhima Bhoi is further known for being radically opposed to superstition and idol worship.[22] The Census Report of 1911 even stated that he wanted to destroy Lord Jagannath's image in Puri.[23] It is said that he believed that if the image was destroyed, it would convince the Hindus of the futility of their religion, and they would embrace the new faith. In obedience to his command, a body of his followers marched to Puri and tried to break into the shrine of Jagannath. Riots broke out; people entered the temple, and one person died mysteriously. The details of the story are not at issue here but rather the commonly accepted statement that Bhima Bhoi participated in or at least encouraged the attack of the Jagannath temple. According to Anncharlott Eschmann (1975: 10), it seems very unlikely that Bhima Bhoi directed that incident although it was connected with him. Bhagirathi Nepak (1997: 72) goes a step further and doubt that the attack on Jagannath was sanctioned by Bhima Bhoi. Biswamoy Pati even

questions the participation of any Mahima Dharmee in the attack. He rightly observes that 'this event is virtually forgotten by the followers of the cult today, who are almost embarrassed about it' and concludes that the colonial powers invented a conspiracy in order to stop the growing Mahima Dharma movement (Pati, 1997: 132). Again this conclusion seems exaggerated, as Ishita Banerjee's recent article (2001) has shown.

The question remains as to why the event has been forgotten or why it is voluntarily ignored by the Mahima Dharmees of today. Nepak (1997: 71) has drawn the attention to the fact that Bhima Bhoi was an admirer of Jagannath. He did not question the existence of the god, but the worship of piece of wood in Puri. One has to keep in mind that the Mahima Dharmees appropriated Jagannath as the first disciple of Mahima Gosain.[24] In other words, Orissa's *rashtra devata* was peacefully incorporated into the Mahima Dharma religion. That seems to be the reson why the so-called 'fanatic' attack on the jagannath temple of Puri did not enter the collective memory of the Mahima Dharmees. The new Mahima Dharma has replaced the Jagannath cult and the Mahima *gaddis* at Khaliapali and Joranda are holier and more important than the Jagannath's *tirtha* in Puri.

WOMEN EMANCIPATOR OR RENUNCIANT?

It is widely accepted that Bhima Bhoi lived with four women, two 'worldly' and two 'spiritual' consorts: Sumedha, Rohini, Saraswati, and Annapurna. According to different stories, Sumedha, Rohini, and Saraswati were offered to Bhima Bhoi as servants. Their parents were staunch followers of Mahima Dharma with a deep admiration for Bhima Bhoi.

Regarding Annapurna, things are different since she joined her own will. It is said that she followed only the order of Mahima Gosain. But as a matter of fact she stayed with Bhima Bhoi having the strong desire to offer him her *seva* (service). After Bhima Bhoi's death, the management of the ashram came into her hands. Concerning Bhima Bhoi's relationship with her, one piquant question remains. Did he adopt a life of chastity? Interestingly most Mahima followers pretend that he was never

married and that his relations with women were only 'spiritual'. It is said that Annapurna was living a life of austerity and moral purity. It is even claimed that she was goddess. As his principal spiritual consort, her shoes (*paduka*) are till today kept together with Bhima Bhoi's in Khaliapali and are worshipped on special occasions. Concerning the nature of their relationship it is generally stated that it was purely spiritual. In an interview I was told this:

Annapurna, a brahmin girl, devoted her life to Bhima Bhoi and came with him to Khaliapali. Annapurna's relatives were not happy with that. They spread the rumour that Bhima Bhoi had abducted the brahmin girl. Furious as they were, they went to see Bhima Bhoi. They disrobed him. But what did they discover? They saw that he had no penis. After they understood that his relationship with Annapurna was only spiritual.

But what about the other women? Surprisingly they got pregnant. Did Bhima Bhoi beget child although he was not supposed to procreate? How can one justify this? A story reads:

Narayan Das and Mohan Das, the fathers of Sumedha and Rohini, came once to Bhima Bhoi and complained that they had not gained anything from delivering their daughters to him. Then Bhima Bhoi pasted vermilion on the forehead of Sumedha and Rohini. As a result, Kapilesvar, a son and Labanyabati, a daughter, were born.

In another story it is said that Sumesha's mother came once from Ragapali to Khaliapali to pray to Bhima Bhoi. She wanted to take *darshana* in Khaliapali. She prayed to him that her daughter should always be happy. For her, it was clear that being a woman she should also become a mother. Bhima Bhoi smiled and promised to fulfil her desire smearing some *bibhuti* (holy ashes) on Sumedha's forehead. And, of course, the result came immediately. After three days she gave birth to a son.

However, some texts suggest that his followers, or at least a section of them, disapprove of this development. Let us quote an interesting passage from a letter written by the Assistant Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces

(no. 3069-161), dated 17 August 1881. In the sixth paragraph, the author writes about Bhima Bhoi:

(Bhima Bhoi) exercised great influence over his followers. The relations existing between him and a female companion, however, excited suspicion among his adherents, who, however, did not venture to question the purity of his conduct until the woman became pregnant. Bhima endeavoured to deceive his followers by telling them the woman would give to Arjun, who would root out all unbelievers. They believed this story, and waited until the child was born, when to their great surprise, they found that the woman gave birth to a girl. Bhima accounted for this by saying that it had recently been revealed to him the woman would give birth to a female, who would destroy all the unbelievers by means of her charms. The child, however, died a few days later, and Bhima then tried to mislead his followers still further by saying that the fairy had quitted [sic] this world because she had found it filled with vices of mankind. He was now deserted by most of his followers, who formed a separate faction but he is still highly adored and honoured by the remainder.[25]

Interestingly this is the story about a child is neither who died shortly after his birth. In other words, the mentioned child is neither Kapilesver nor Labanyavati. Further, the rather negative characterization of Bhima Bhoi needs our attention. He is described as misguiding and cheating his followers. The same radical criticism is expressed by the authors of the Census of India from 1911 who repeated the same story. In the same year, in 1991, B.C. Mazumdar wrote his famous article entitled 'Alekhism' as a part of his book *Sonpur in the Sambalpur Tract*. In this article we find the same statement that Bhima Bhoi begot children and that this fact created much dissent among his followers. However, his judgement is less harsh. Let us quote the passage (Mazumdar, 1911: 34):

Bhima Bhoi as a matter of fact did beget two children-one a son and another a daughter-on two women, who became nuns and lived at Khaliapali in Bhima Bhoi's math. Both these women are still living at Khaliapali with the children begotten upon them. It was nineteen years ago that a daughter and then after two

months a son were born having Bhima Bhoi for their father. The disciples were no doubt very much shocked at it. But Bhima Bhoi explained to them that he brought one male and one female child into existence with a view to give to the world one ideal woman and one ideal man. How these two ideal beings are behaving now could not be ascertained by me.

It is certain that the existence of women within the ashram was the major reason for the twist between Joranda and Khaliapali. It is told some ascetics came from Joranda to burn down Bhima Bhoi's ashram in Gulunda because he had transgressed the rules regading procreation. In fact, an important section of the Joranda ascetics regard him as a heretic. It seems very clear that in their mind the propensity to procreate is the root of all evil. According to their ascetic ideal, the perfect man is one who gains full control over sexual desires. The ascetics are expected to contemplate every morning on the organs of generation without becoming stimulated so that ultimately complete detachment from sexual proclivity might be obtained. That is, their minds are able to dominate their bodily functions. Accordingly to that ideal, a holy man has no sexual feelings. But one should keep in mind that though Joranda represents the most powerful and influential Mahima Dharma monastery today, other 'heretic' currents do exist apart from Khaliapali where till today women are living as *sannyasinis* in the ashram. The Satya Svadhin Mahima Dharmis of Kardula went even a step further. Having founded their independent 'sect' they demand that all members get married. It is said that because Bhima Bhoi was a *grhastha* (householder), all members of their group should be grhasthas also.[26]

One should, indeed, interpret this conflict in a positive way. I was told that Bhima Bhoi went to Joranda after the death of Mahima Gosain and that he was terrified by the local form of worship. He left the place swearing that he would never return and founded in 1877, under the patronage of Raja Bahadur Niladhar Singh Deo, his own ashram in Khaliapali where he could accept women as disciples. In this sense, Bhima Bhoi can be seen as advocating the emancipation of women. He

said that there is no difference between men and women in his ashram at Khaliapali. It is reported that he chose Annapurna, a brahmin woman, as a companion which was as affront to the traditionalists who do not approve of any relationship between a low-caste man and a high-caste woman. In fact, Bhima Bhoi's ashram can be seen as a counterpart to the ashram of Joranda.

But there are other stories, Bhima Bhoi's chastity is contested by his own writings. Indeed in his *Cautisha Granthamala*, he admits to having several wives (!) and made explicit erotic references.[27] But again, this fact is voluntarily ignored by some Mahima Dharmees. Others disqualify these poems as being composed *before* he become a saint. And again others read them as allegories of his love towards his guru. There are again apocrypha about Bhima Bhoi which regard him as a 'womanizer' in his youth. He is imagined as being fair and muscled, having a strong and hairless body. It is also reported that he enjoyed wearing women's clothing. It appears that is an interesting field of investigation. However, people are reluctant to talk about this rather unusual aspect of Bhima Bhoi. In fact, if one looks into his poetic composition, one finds a lot of references to sex and physical enjoyment. He never claimed to be an ascetic or to have renounced his status of a householder.[28] On the contrary, there exist a certain number of passages where he openly refuses to adopt a chaste lifestyle.

We see that Bhima Bhoi does not fit into the canonical picture of a saint who lives his life in devotion to god and austerity. This leads to diverse reactions among his followers which can be illustrated by the narratives mentioned above. The first option is to adversely criticize Bhima Bhoi and to reject his immoral attitudes. The Balkaladharis of Joranda clearly express this opinion. The second option is to ignore all accusations and to see Bhima Bhoi as well as his children as a kind of divine incarnations, being above the physical world of sex and gender. Being divine, Bhima Bhoi can emanate children, staying with women yet refraining from touching them.

CONTESTED HAGIOGRAPHY

It has become clear that most of the stories about Bhima Bhoi have to be understood in the context of Indian hagiographies. His biography makes a lot of references to 'classic' mythological sequences as well as contemporary political discourses about social emancipation and reform. The controversies mentioned above concerning the life of Bhima Bhoi result from the different perspectives from which he is examined. These controversies culminate in the following question: if and to what extent, Bhima Bhoi was against orthodoxy, tradition, brahmanic hegemony, Vedas and ritualistic Hinduism?

Further we must examine the people who create and the institutions that promote these stories. Discourses are not created in an empty space but embedded in social interactions. The first institutionalized group to examine is the ascetic order. The documents concerning the juridical debate between the Balkaladharis and Kaupinadharis of Joranda are especially revealing for our investigation.[29] It is not the question of who is superior, nor the struggle concerning the temple management, property, money, influence, nor domination which attracts me, neither do the arguments, the enquiries, replies, and court decisions. What makes this controversy interesting is the fact that Bhima Bhoi is a reference in the ongoing fight of influence among these two groups. There seems to be a different reception of Bhima Bhoi: while the Kaupinadharis claim to follow Bhima Bhoi's books as the main source, as their holy book, the Balkaladharis seem to take Bhima Bhoi as one amongst others. They do not seem to accord him a special position. In an open letter Biswanath Baba, who was one of the main actors in this debate, presents his point of view. Speaking for the Balkaladhari community, he says that the books of Bhima Bhoi are not taken as books laying down regulations or roles of conduct but they are accepted as religious books, and they are read along with others.[30] Bhima Bhoi, having accepted two brahmin ladies, deviated from the principles of Mahima Dharma. According to Satrughna Nath, spokesman of Biswanath Baba, sannyasins from Joranda should not stay in Khaliapali and should not take any food.[31]

On the other hand, the Kaupinadharies accept Bhima Bhoi's writings as a code and authority.[32] Bhima Bhoi is either considered as the absolute authority, the mouthpiece of Mahima Swami, or as just one writer among others. In the final judgment of the court it is stated that the Balkaladharis are the legitimate owners of the Mahima Gadi in Joranda and that their authority should be respected. They are now officially recognized as the legitimate representatives of the Mahima Dharma religion. The Kaupinadharis have lost. The argument of Biswanath Baba has been accepted, and the predominant role of Bhima Bhoi as it was projected by the Kaupinadharis is nullified. Biswanath Baba's group not only recognizes other Hindu Scriptures such as the Manusmriti as equally-or even more-important but also argues that the philosophy of Mahima Dharma is in full accordance with the Vedas, the Puranas, and the Bhagavadgita. According to them Mahima Dharma is nothing else but true Vedanta. Bhima Bhoi's revolutionary and challenging positions are neutralized and annihilated. The particularity of Mahima Dharma due to Bhima Bhoi's extraordinary criticism becomes less visible. In other words, the challenging appeal of the Mahima Dharma movement which led some people to conclude that the Mahima Dharmees are a separate that is, a non-Hindu sect, is disappearing. Biswanath Baba functions here as a motor of ongoing saffronization.[33] According to him, it is impossible to consider Mahima Dharma as different from Vedanta and sanatana Dharma. Mahima Dharma has become part of the dominant Hindu mainstream.

In this ongoing process of interpretation, adaptation, and reappropriation of Bhima Bhoi, the Mahima Dharmees of the Kardula village represent another contrasting agent. Their *matha* was founded by a certain Satya Narayan Baba. Whilst all members-as well as the founder himself-belong to the Ganda caste, they claim that people from other castes such as brahmins, chasa, and dumal also take *diksha* and join them. One has to notice that in Orissa the Gandas are treated as untouchable. The converts seem to question everything in Mahima Dharma. For example, they worship an image arguing that no one ever condemned idol worship. Interestingly they legitimate their

difference by insisting that they alone are the true followers of Bhima Bhoi. Accordingly to Satya Narayan's wife, who is still very much alive, her husband was as incarnation of god. She claimed that he continued the mission of Bhima Bhoi when he had left this world. He completed the unfinished work attracting a large number of followers and disciples. In fact, this section of the Mahima Dharmees illuminates clearly the subaltern aspect of the Mahima Dharma. The so-called down trodden communities have adopted the Mahima cult as their specific religion in order to protest against their social and religious exclusion. But the explicit anti-brahmanism represents only one current of the totality of the Mahima Dharma movement, for we have to recall that Joranda is not a subaltern institution but a powerful monastery supported by rich farmers and upper castes.

Bhima Bhoi is not only appropriated and contested within the Mahimite community. He has become a vehicle of affirming a specific culture Oriya identity. Bhima Bhoi is promoted as one of the founding fathers of Oriya literature. He is considered to be a national integrator. Through him tribal and Vedic culture became united and harmonized. He was preaching universal love, a universal message among the rich and the poor, among the kings and the Adivasis of the jungle. Many institutions in the name of Bhima Bhoi exist. Let us take only the Bhima Bhoi Samadhi Pitha Trust of Khaliapali (Sonepur) as a significant example.

As a saint Bhima Bhoi is believed to offer solutions to contemporary problems. The hagiographic narratives are orientated to representing an example to follow; the educational aspect is very expressive. Let us quote Sudhakar Das (2000: 6), a Reader in Oriya from Sonepur College who says:

In the present context, age-old problems like casteism, ignorance, and poverty are still persisting newer and more vicious challenges like communalism, violence against women, especially rape and dowry torture, corruption and degradation of moral values are confronting the people, almost paralyzing the growth of the nation. As such time, the thinking of Bhima Bhoi, the revolutionary, the visionary, philosopher, and poet might provide a solution.

Equally Gorekanath Sahu (1999), lawyer and journalist from Sonepur states:

The application of the great thinker's philosophy can find elusive solution to the myriad of problems by which the society has been plagued.

Bhima Bhoi is hero above all creeds and religions; he is no longer a preacher of Mahima Dharma. He becomes a universal savior, an example of universal humanity. In fact, Bhima Bhoi has become more and more an object of diverse political and religious discourses. Congress politicians have appropriated Bhima Bhoi as the direct precursor of Gandhi and prophet of Indian Independence. Ancharlott Eschmann (1978: 407) quotes a booklet which culminates in identifying Bhima Bhoi as fighter for the unification of India under the banner of sanatana dharma. I have to add the Bhima Bhoi also represents the significance of western Oriya culture in a pan-Indian context. He is currently easily integrated in the separatist discourse demanding an independent Koshal Pradesh. More and more intellectuals reclaim Bhima Bhoi as man of the soil demanding that his writings be published in their original language, Sambalpuri. Bhima Bhoi is used as a critic of the coastal hegemony and a forerunner of western Orissa's fight for recognition.

Let me mention another interesting phenomenon. From the scientific point of view it has always been highlighted that the Mahima Dharma is an autochthonous reform movement which developed independently from Christian influences. This would be the principal characteristic which distinguishes it from other so-called neo-Hindu reform movement such as the Arya Samaj or the Ramakrishna Mission. This statement is partially correct. Bhima Bhoi was not in the position to become influenced by Western missionaries. He did not travel to Western country; his cultural background was very different from that of Vivekananda. However, we have to be very careful with arguments based on this assumption. Firstly, we should remember that Bhima Bhoi did establish some contact with Christianity. We know that he was accused of being a secret Christian though he refused this vehemently. Secondly, it should be reminded that the discourse of

Bhima Bhoi's Indianness is much used by nationalist Hindus. They always argue that the Mahima Dharmees are 'real' Hindus and that they were not influenced by any Christians. They emphasize, on the contrary, that Bhima Bhoi *resisted* the Christians. Being a tribal, he did not convert to Christianity but reformed Hinduism. Doing so, he saved the masses from becoming Christians. In that way Bhima Bhoi is a true nationalist, defending the Hindus against the foreign missionaries. Significant is the anti-Western and anti-Christian tone of this discourse.

Thus far we have seen the nationalistic interpretation of Bhima Bhoi. But there are other voices to be heard. As I have already argued, Bhima Bhoi is a matter of ongoing negotiations between different socio-religious groups. In Sonepur, I had an interview with culminated in the question of whether Bhima was Christian or not. He, of course, argued that Bhima Bhoi was Christian, having converted due to some divine visions. But he was a secret Christian. He could not declare it openly because people would torture him. He had already suffered so much when people had tried to kill him. While not particularly esteeming this argumentation, it does reveal some interesting facts. The pastor belonged to the Ganda-Pana caste and heard I was interested in Bhima Bhoi. By telling me that Bhima Bhoi was Christian he tried to stoke my curiosity. He tried to impress me. It is the dynamic of this communicational situation which I want to stress. In a competition, in a fight for recognition, influence, prestige, and superiority, Bhima Bhoi's reference becomes a valuable argument.

CONCLUSION

It has become clear that Bhima Bhoi is imagined in many ways: a poet, a freedom fighter, a prophet, a *bhakta*, a *santha*, and even as an incarnation of god. The question is then how one can analyse the diversity of interpretations. First of all, it has to be admitted that he was without any doubt an extraordinary person and that he must have had a charismatic personality. Bhima Bhoi further seems to defy all attempts at characterization. From the reading of his poetry, one easily imagines his complex and contradictory

personality. He definitely was above any kind of sectarian affiliation or dogmatism. He was a poet, householder, a mystic, and a devotee.

With a rich hagiographic tradition in mind, people started narrating Bhima Bhoi's life. Certain narrators might have been inspired by his complex personality. Most of the stories circulate independently from the historicity of the depicted events or persons. They follow a culturally determined canon of religious topics such as miraculous birth, conversion, healing power, and sagacity. Supreme human qualities such as altruism or secular virtues such as a sense of social equality, national integration, and patriotism, are the other recurrent topics which can be extracted. Bhima Bhoi is even commemorated as semi-divine person within an explicit mythological framework. Attempts are made to Hinduize Bhima Bhoi, but they remain ineffective since contesting narratives continue to circulate. In fact, the extraordinary regional and cultural diversity which characterizes Mahima Dharma in Orissa opposes this kind of appropriation.

In other words, Bhima Bhoi is re-actualized in different contexts and is a part of diverse religious discourses and political projections. His life is permanently reinvented and canonized by particular persons and institutions. The multiple and contradicting biographies reveal social conflicts as well as different models of sainthood. Ascetic ideals compete with ideas on social reform, religious authorities are contested. I do stress the contradicting dynamic involved in the process of creating Bhima Bhoi's life since there is no such as a normative hagiography, canonized by a certain institution. In the case of Bhima Bhoi we have seen that there are many texts competing with one another, each claiming to be an authority. It is only through a synchronic perspective that variations and contradictions can be seriously taken into account. A diachronic perspective will show which topics dominate and which stories disappear. This is an ongoing process, and no definite account of the life of Bhima Bhoi can be given. New discourses about him will either erase (such as the scientific one which I circulate) or contribute to his sainthood.

ENDNOTES :

1. The present research was funded by the German Research Council (DFG). However, it could not have been done without the help of my many Indian friends and colleagues. I am especially grateful to Kedar Mishra from Sonepur for his assistance and Dr Gourang Charan Dash from Anugul for providing me with numerous documents. The passages of Bhima Bhoi's *Stuticintamani* have been translated into English by Sanjeeb Kumar Nayak.
2. For more detailed information on the theology, history, and organization of Mahima Dharma in Orissa, see the works of Eschmann (1978), Deo (1999), Banerjee (1999 and 2001), Mishra (1998), and Lidia Guzy's contribution in the present volume.
3. See for example the widely circulated edition of Bhima Bhoi's collected works published in 1991 by Karunakara Sahu: *Bhaktakavi Bhima Bhoi Granthavali* (Oriya), Cuttack: Dharmagrantha Store.
4. See for example Basu (1911: 161), Mazumdar (1911: 139) or Sharma (1942: 35)
5. The notice of 'orthodox Hinduism' is problematic since the term Hinduism is itself a construction and a descriptive abstraction designing a very complex and contradictory ensemble of theological concepts, cultural norms, and ritual practices. In the absence of any centralized religious authority, the term of orthodoxy has therefore a quite distinct meaning. It designates generally brahmanic Hinduism.
6. Cf. S. Mahapatra (1983); B. Nepak (1997); S. Nath (1990).
7. Cf. Debendra Dash's (1997) re-edition of articles on Bhima Bhoi published in Oriya newspapers of the time.
8. Hegiography refers to the body of literature describing the lives and veneration of the Christian saints. The literature of hagiography embraces acts of the martyrs (that is, accounts of their trials and deaths); biographies of saintly

monks, bishops, princes, or virgins; and accounts of miracles connected with saints, tombs, relics, icons, or statues. As Hawley (1987), Callewaert, Snell (1994), and Mallison (2001) have shown, this concept can be used to study stories of Muslim saints, Buddhist Bodhisattavas, or Hindu poets in a comparative perspective.

9. The New Testament is a famous example of the misreading of religious 'biographies'. For a long time, theologians tried to find out the historical facts about the life of Jesus by eliminating systematically all legendry elements in the Gospels. Contemporary research has abandoned the idea of getting any objective information about Jesus himself and analyses the New Testament as a collection of stories *about* Jesus written in specific communicational contexts. Cf. Wilhelm Egger, *Methodenlehre zum Neuen Testament*, Breisgua, Herder, 1987.

10. Some *bhajans* of Bhima Bhoi are available on audio-cassettes: *Mahima Alekh* (*Bhimabhoi Bhajan*), presented by Arabinda Muduli, recorded at J.E. Studios, Cuttack, produced and distributed by Jagannath Electronics, Cuttack; *Bhimabhoi Bhajan*, presented by Mana Mahapatra, recorded at J.E. Studios Cuttack, produced and distributed by Jagannath Electronics, Cuttack.

11. Bhima Bhoi is believed to have predicted the 'Super Cyclone'. From his *Padmakalpa* he is quated: 'All of a sudden a cyclone will come and swallow all villages, towns, and countries', cf. *Ghora Kali Yuganta* 1999-2010 (Oriya) edited by A.K. Sahu, 1999, Cuttack: Dharmagrantha Store.

12. The couplet reads: '*Pranika arata duhkha apramita, dekhu dekhu keba sahu, mo jivana pachhe narke padithau, jagata uddhara he*u'. B. Nepak (1998: 42) translates: 'Boundless is the anguish and misery of the living. Who can see it and tolerance? Let my soul be condemned to hell, but let the universe be redeemed.'

13. *Stuticintamani*, 2.15.

14. Op. cit., 21.16-17.
15. Op. cit., 21.7-11.
16. The term *pancashakha* means 'the five friends' and denotes a mystic movement in medieval Orissa of which Achyutananda Das is one of the most important representatives. Sec C. Das 1951.
17. Interestingly the Mahima Dharmees who originate from the Desi tribal of Koraput, do not have any knowledge about Bhima Bhoi. See the fascinating research undertaken by Lidia Guzy (2001).
18. On behalf of the Ganda-Panas, see the monograph of Nityananda Patnaik and Sarat Chandra Mohanty 1988.
19. According to N.N. Basu (1911: 161), Satrughna Nath (1990: 11), Chittaranjan Das (1951: 160), and Ancharlott Eschmann (1978- 382), Bhima Bhoi was blind from his birth. However, according to Bibhuti Mishra (1998: 64-8), Sitakanta Mahapatra (1983: 10-11), and Bhagirathi Nepak (1997: 96), Bhima Bhoi was not blind at all.
20. See *Stuticintamani*, 20. 6-7 and 20.13.
21. Op. cit., 92.1.
22. In his *Stuticintamani* 1.12, he says for example: 'Abandoning the worship of gods and goddesses made of clay and stones, I have been meditating on you only with deep sincerity and steadfastness with the hope of getting salvation.'
23. Census of India, 1911, Religion, Chapter iv, p. 212.
24. It is told that Lord Jagannath incarnated as Jagannath Das who later became Govinda Das, the founder of the ashram in Balasingha, cf. Biswanath Baba (1991: 41); Sahoo (2001: 73); Eschmann (1978: 382)
25. The transcript of the letter is kept in the Orissa Archive of the South Asia Institute in Heidelberg.
26. In a personal communication Martin Fuchs confirmed parallel observations. According to him, most of the

details with whom he interacted in Dharavi, the largest slum settlement in Mumbai, seem to disregard unmarried men. Could one conclude that this represents a common characteristic or a cultural pattern among so-called lower or non-brahmin caste?

27. He uses for example the world of *amrita* (mythic nectar of eternal life) to designate the male semen; the female vagina is termed *padma* (lotus).

28. In *Stuticintamani* 63.10 he admits to enjoying the pleasures of this world. Moreover he does not see any harm in it.

29. The *Balkaladharis* put on the bark of the Kumbhi-tree, claiming that their vestment signigies spiritual superiority. According to them, every novice (*tyagi*)first gets a *kaupina* cloth from his guru, and if he is approved, the *balkala*. The *Kaupinadharis* were loin-cloth of red ochre dyed cloth because according to them Mahima Gosain gave the *balkala* only to a limited number of disciples, that is the sixty-four *siddhas*. In other words, the Balkaladharis claim to be on the top of the scared hierarchy, but the kaupinadharis do not recognize this claim and fight for an equal recognition.

30. Deposition by Abadhut Biswanath Baba before the commissioner of endowments, Orissa, Cuttack, 28 March 1961, South Asia Institute, Orissa Archive, MSS 175.

31. See an interview with Anncharlon Eschmann on 30 July 1971. The transcript of the interview is kept in the Orissa Archive of the South Asia Institute in Heidelberg.

32. Cf. 'Shri Mahima Gadi, Joranda', Signed C. Mohapatra, Commissioner of Endowments, 4 October 1967, South Asia Institute, Orissa Archive, MSS 175.

33. Satrughna Nath (1990: 99) wrongly translated the term *geru* designing the earthen colour of the ascetic robe, as saffron.

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The Influence of the Naths on Bhima Bhoi and Mahima Dharma[1]

Ishita Banerjee-Dube

The considerable overlap between the traditions of the Naths and the Nirgunis (follower as of sects that worship a formless God) and between yoga and tantra has been noted by various scholars. It is also generally accepted that all these trends had a pervasive influence over new religious orders in all religions of India. This is not surprising: "traditions" in real lives and societies actually mingle and overlap; their separations into self-contained, tidy categories is a function of academic analysis. Yoga and tantra, linked to practices that relate directly to control over the body, had common origins, although they developed different trajectories on distinct trends through the centuries. What we now consider to be "classical yoga" with "traditions that involve meditation, breath control and postures" arose from trends that are neither ancient nor classical (white 2009a 105). Early traditions of yoga referred to practices of dying as a yogic event: "of a warrior's departure for the heavens, the sun and the world of Brahman beyond," or of a recluse's practice of yoking one body to another (white 2009a, 97-98). It is this practice of yoking which permitted Gorakhnath, the legendary founder of the Nath yogis, "to leave a myriad of burial tumuli (samadhis), scattered across South Asia, tumuli said to house the bodies he left behind, when he choose to inhibit other younger, fresher bodies" (White 2009a, 104). This was how a yogi conquered his own death.

At a different levels, yoga was considered to be the union or contact of the individual soul with God, which enabled the human practitioner to attain the eight supernatural powers (siddhis) of the God Mahesvara or Shiva. In this trend also, the yogi imitated Shiva by entering the body of a corpse on a cremation ground (White 2009a 100). Similarly, a tantric yogi haunted cremation grounds in imitation of his god Bhairava, a horrific form of Shiva, and conquered death by yoking another body to his. Moreover,

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the yogi could also multiply himself like his god Bhairava in order to combat the demonic forces that would otherwise invade the citadel of the worshipper's body. These ideas took different forms and meanings in diverse trends over the centuries, but the notion of the body as the receptacle of divine energy remained.

With this discussion in mind, let us turn to the interface of such in later religious orders. The focus will be on Mahima Dharma, a radical religious formation of nineteenth century Orissa. My analysis will proceed along two lines, First, it will examine the influence of Nath ideas and practices on Mahima Dharma, and second, it will unpack the palpable presence of yoga/tantra in the religious poetry of Bhima Bhoi, the poet-philosopher of the Dharma, underlining in the process the tensions and confusions that are found in the traditions of the Naths and tantra.

INTERSECTING INFLUENCES

Mahima Dharma was founded in the 1860s by an abstemious, wandering ascetic who came to be known as Mahima Swami. It advocated devotion to an all pervasive, formless Absolute---equally accessible to all---as the only way of salvation. This seemingly simple message rendered redundant worship of idols, including that of Jagannath, the central deity of Hinduism in Orisha and the state deity for centuries, and questioned complex hierarchies of caste and kingship, and the role of the Brahman as a mediator between gods and men. The radical message was worked out in practices that contravened the rules of caste and norms of commensality. Mahima Swami asked for cooked rice as alms for all households irrespective of the castes of the householders, and later he and his disciples together ate this rice from the same pot.

This brief sketch of the basic tenets and practices of the faith makes it evident that it pertained to the Nirguna tradition although it also absorbed elements from the rich heritage of religious ideas current in the region. Let me pause here to offer a glimpse of the religious panorama of Orissa. The regional identity of present Orissa turns around its language that again distinguishes itself by virtue of its religious/devotional poetry. This is because Orissa

has been home to almost all the important currents of religious thought – Buddhist, Nath, tantric, Shakta, Shaiva, and bhakti. The most prominent manifestation of Vaishnavite bhakti is the cult of Jagannath, the Lord of the Universe. In the course of its long and colourful evolution this cult has drawn upon, assimilated, or suppressed these different trends. Jagannath is at once a *savara-devata* (god of the *adivais*, or aboriginals), and Buddha-Jagannath, the ninth incarnation of Vishnu. Jagannath is the Great Lord of all but the personal god of none. All his numerous ritual servants, beginning with the Raja of Puri, the first servitor, worship of Devi in her different forms, as their *ista-devata* (personal god). The enclosure where the food offerings to Jagannath are kept within the inner sanctum of the temple is in the shape of a yoni (vagina), a clear indication of the influence of tantra and Shakta worship on the cult.

Mahima Dharma imbibed this vibrant heritage of thought and practice although it openly contested rituals and idol worship. Let me cite the first report on the founder of Mahima Dharma, published in the Oriya newspaper Utkal Deepika on June 1,1867, to illustrate my point:

A new faith was spreading in the princely states bordering Cuttack. It has been founded by a phalahari sanyasi (an ascetic who ate only fruits) who lived on Kapilas hill in Dhenkanal. The ascetic had initially subsisted on fruits alone, later on milk and, in the end, only on water. He worshipped Siva. One day, on the directions of sunya (the great void), he cut off his matted locks and gave up his vocation as a mere renouncer. He began wearing the bark of a tree and spread a dharma that disregarded caste distinctions, forbade idol worship and rituals- for example, sraddha (death rites)- and advocated a belief in one isvara (god). The sanyasi was described as ati nirlobh (completely free of greed) and praised for his efforts to feed people at a time of scarcity. He had constructed large temporary houses where he fed forty to fifty thousand people. He then burnt these houses and moved on to somewhere else. The ascetic was said to command great respect[1]..

This report was given greater flourishes in the reports of local officials in the early 1880s[2].Colonial administrators organized

varied references to a *dhulia babaji*, a *phalahari sanyasi*, and a *khsira-nira payee* into an orderly sequence of distinct phases in the same person's life. The founder of Mahima Dharma, they stated was initially an "achari boishnab" (practicing Vaishnava) who at the same time covered his body with ashes like Shaiva ascetics. Hence, he was called "dhulia babaji." During the next phase of his long stay at Kapilas, which lasted twenty-four years, he lived the first twelve years on fruit *(phalhari)* and the next twelve years on milk and water (khsira-nira payee). Moreever, although he worshipped Shiva at Kapilas, he continued to wear a *kaupin* (loincloth) and kanthi (necklace of wooden beads): "the two distinctive features in the raiment of a Vaishnava.[3]" It was only after he has finished his experiments with Hindu asceticism and decided to preach his own faith that he gave up the kaupin and kanthi and wore *kumbhipat* (at bark of the *kumbhi tree*). This symbolic act snapped his links with Hinduism and set him off on his own as the founder of a new dharma.

The play of different motifs and symbols in these reports is significant. He is described as an ascetic who practises Vaishnavism but covers his body with ashes, an ascetic who then becomes a worshipper of Shiva but continues with the garb of a Vaishnava. Shiva and Vishnu are not just two prominent deities of Hinduism. Shiva, the primordial guru of yoga, is identified as the god of the Naths and all Siddha schools (Dasgupta 1976, 195, 197) and the Nirguni saints (followers of the Nirguni sects), on the other hand, are notionally related to Vishnu (Lorenzen 1995, 2). Moreover, Shiva and Vishnu represent different notions of sexuality. Shiva is an erotic ascetic, a phallic god, whose asceticism does not entail sexual abstinence (Doniger 1973,5). The extant mythology of Shiva emphasizes the apparently opposing stands of Shiva's nature, at time offering mutual resolutions between them and at times accepting them as aspects of one single nature.

Vishnu, on the other hand, represents the ideal householder. He – together with his wife Lakshmi, the goddess of beauty and prosperity – assures the conservation and well-being of the universe. At the same time, Vishnu and Lakshmi defy a key norm of domestic sex within marriage, the aim of procreation:

the divine couple has no children. Shiva and his consort Parvati, on the other hand, have children. This contradictory situation questions the clear separation between the ascetic and the householder and the related idea of denial of sex (based upon avoidance of all contact with women), and acceptance of sexual relations with women. This has occasioned different understandings of asceticism in different Indian traditions and caused considerable tension between conflicting notions of self-restraint and indulgence. Shiva is the guru both of the yoga and of tantra, trends that have distinguished themselves on grounds of distinct emphases on austere asceticism and sexual relations. Yoga is widely associated with austere asceticism and tantra with sexual excess; myths regarding Matsyendranath and his disciple Gorakshanatha (Gorakhnath) graphically represent the tension within the tradition on the issue of association with women (Munoz 2010)[4]

Mahima Swami, the founder of Mahima Dharma, alternated between and combined elements of the worship of Shiva and Vishnu before preaching his own faith. In popular perceptions, he symbolizes the self-restrained, detached ascetic, a divine incarnation whose death shocked his followers. His disciple Bhima Bhoi, the poet-philosopher of the faith, took the life of a householder, cohabited with four women and fathered two children. Mahima Swami and Bhima Bhoi represent Matsyendra and Gorakh in reverse order: Gorakh saved his guru from the "degradation" he had suffered by falling into the temptation of female company. Bhima Bhoi, on the other hand, deviated from the path of his preceptor and lived with women. His poems justify his householder status on grounds that it was ordained both by fate and by his guru.

Mahima Swami's link to the Nath yogis was reflected not only in his asceticism, but also in the other practices he adopted. Like the Nath yogis, Mahima Swami lit the *dhuni* (a sacred fire), in places of his temporary residence. Although the literature on naths almost always mentions *dhuni*, it never properly explains what it signified. The use of dhunis is common among several ascetic orders and sects. Brigg's describes the dhuni as a "fire, consisting

of a smouldering log of wood (or more than one), sometimes in a hollow pit." Briggs goes on to mention that whenever "a Kanphata yogi takes up his abode he lights his fire, provided there is not one already at the place. At all important shrines and monasteries such fires are found, some of which have been kept burning for long periods of time. The dhuni at Dhinodhar, and those at Gorakhpur, Tilla and Pae Dhuni in Bombay are famous because of associations with Dharamnath, Gorakhnath and others. These have been kept burning for centuries" (Briggs 2001,21).[5] Indeed, the importance of the dhuni among the Kanphatas was such that even the householder followers kept a dhuni lit in their houses (ibid.).

Briggs links the *dhuni* with the practice of Shaiva ascetics covering themselves with ashes; he also notes that this practice is very old and is not limited only to Shaiva ascetics. This is borne out by the fact that the Udasi Sikhs also use the *dhuni*. The Shaiva ascetics usually cover themselves with ashes from the dhuni, in the same way that "Shiva, as the Yogi par excellence, covers his body with ashes from the burning grounds"(ibid.,16). Veronique Bouillier makes the same connection of ashes and the dhuni with cremation grounds and physical death, arguing that they also represent the "transition from mundane to secret realms, dissolution of ego-consciousness and destruction of worldly attachments." The ashes on Shiva's body, according to Bouillier, are those of "cosmic conflagration and symbolize Shiva's transformative powers"(Bouillier 2004,36-37). [6]

All this is significant for our purposes. Early reports on the founder of Mahima Dharma call him "dhulia babaji" and state that he covered his body with ashes but make no mention of the dhuni. It is only after he started preaching the Mahima Dharma that the dhuni became associated with him. The Swami, as we have noted was a worshipper of Shiva, although he wore the kaupin and kanthi of the Vaishnavas. It is very probable that dhulia babaji got the ashes from his own sacred fire at a time when his links with Shiva and the Nath tradition were more intimate. The new faith he propounded and particularly the mutations in it over

time made this connection distant and tenuous to the point of being almost unrecognizable.

The *dhuni*, one of the makers of Mahima Dharma since its inception, is meant to clear away sin and darkness. The first report on Mahima Swamin refers to the sacred fire and a later report corroborates that the first semi-permanent structure that the founder set-up was a *dhuni-ghar* (a room where the fire was kept lit) at Malbeharpur, which he left in charge of one of his disciples before coming back and destroying it [17] At Joranda in Dhenkanal, the site of the memorial of Mahima Swami, the, the *akhandabati* (eternal flame) has been a root of contention between two groups of ascetics. The dhuni is an integral part of all Mahima Dharmi rituals; it is said to help the faith usher in the well-being of humankind.

My queries with regard to the origin and the significance of the *dhuni* often caught the lay followers without an answer, while the ascetics offered a host of responses. Kasinath Baba, leader of a rival group within the dharma, argued that agni (fire) has been worshipped since the age of the Vedas and Mahima Dharma, as a "ture" Vedic religion, had adopted it.[8] This response is intriguing. Kasinath Baba claims to follow Bhima Bhoi who had advocated *nirveda sadhana* (mediation without the Vedas). I will come to this shortly. For the sadhus of Jamusara ashram (monastic settlement), yet another dissident group, the dhuni lit with ghee (clarified butter) and incense purified the air. It has no other special meaning or purpose.[9] It was Biswanath Baba, a prominent ascetic who steered the evolution of Mahima Dharma in the twentieth century, who traced the practice of lighting the *dhuni* to Gorakhnath, the earliest yogi, implying thereby the importance of the yogic tradition within the dharma. This is remarkable since Biswanath Baba induced several changes within the faith by aligning Mahima Dharma closely with the Advaita Vedanta tradition of Hidnuism. The dhuni also serves practical purposes, according to Biswanath Baba. It gives warmth to the sadhus who sleep in the open,eliminates darkness, and keeps the ascetics *sachetan* (conscious). The *dhuni* is also lit with a prayer to Alekh Brahma for the welfare of the world.[10]

Perhaps the greatest influence of the Naths and the nirgunis on Mahima Dharma lies in its conception of the Absolute. Despite links to Shiva and Vishunu the Naths and nirgunis emphasize on "ineffable" god beyond from and attributes and underplay the *saguna* ("with-attributes" or theistic) manifestations of the deity. The god of the Naths, in particular, stated to be Alakh, which is derived from the Sanskrit alakshya (imperceptible, beyond perception). The all powerful Absolute, which Mahima Swami advocated as the only object of devotion, was also Alakh or Alekh, which the Mahima Dharmis translate as "a God who is beyond writing, indescribable/inexplicable." The world is creation of the mahima (tradiance/glory) of this Alekh. Indeed, the constant invocation of Alekh by Mahima Swami and his followers meant that in the early phase of its evolution the faith came to be known as Alekh Dharma. As mentioned before, the first detailed report on the dharma published in the *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1882 was titled "on a sect of Hindu dissenters who profess to be the followers of Alekh." In describing the Absolute as Alekh, beyond sense perception, Mahima Dharma moved back to the conception of the Naths and away from the Ultimate as Shunya propounded in the writings of the *Panchasakhas*, the Five Friends, and famous medieval mystics.[11] Mahima Dharma is generally believed to bear the closest resemblance to the *Panchasakhas* in thought and theology.

The third term and practice borrowed from the Naths is that of avadhuta (or abadhut). Although *avadhuta* has different connotations and prevalence among diverse traditions, it generally refers to an ascetic who has risen above bodily consciousness and worldly concerns. The Nath Panth, as is well known, is an Avadhuta Panth which regards Gorakh Nath to be the ideal avadhuta nad highlights the role of the guru and the practice of yoga. Mahima Dharma does not follow the Nath tradition of a *guru-sishya parampara* (a continuous lineage of preceptor and disciple). But for the followers of Mahima Dharma, as well as for Biswanath Baba, Mahima Swami was an ideal abadhut, the guru of the world, who restored the tradition to its pure form and earlier glory.

TANTRIC TRANSITION

Let me now leave Mahima Swami and turn to Bhima Bhoi, a direct disciple of the Swami and the poet-philosopher of the faith. It bears pointing out here that the founder left no compositions or written records of his own. His figure is constructed out of stray features in newspapers and legends, which were given coherence in reports of colonial administrators drawn up in the early 1880s following an incident that brought the faith to the notice of the colonial stage. For this reason, what we know of the theology of Mahima Dharma comes from Bhima Bhoi's verses and later interpretations of the tenets of the faith offered by scholar ascetics like Biswanath Baba. The tension between two groups – the dominant one that seeks to marginalize Bhima Bhoi as a householder devotee, and the rival faction that hold his works to be the canons of the faith – has had a long history, including prolonged legal suits over control of the memorial of the guru.[12] Consequently, my use of the term transition in this section is only in the sense that followers do not associate Mahima Swami with tantric practices. The dominant image is that of a celibate ascetic, reinforced further by his description as the ideal avadhuta by Biswanath Baba. At the same time, members of the rival group define him as Yogesvara (The Lord of Yoga), which can be taken as an indication of his knowledge of yoga and his identification with Shiva.

According to legends, Bhima Bhoi was blind and was born to or raised by Khonds, a group of *adivasis* (original inhabitants). Mahima Swami initiated him and conferred on him the *"eye of knowledge."* Bhima Bhoi had grown up with no formal education but had absorbed and apprehended various traditions of religious and popular literature current in Orissa by the time he was initiated into Mahima Dharma. His imaginative and creative mind combined these received ideas with the teachings of Mahima Swami to produce original compositions. Consequently, his works represent a rich assortment of elements from Vaishnavism, Buddhism, tantra, mysticism, and bhakti. Indeed, one scholar finds in Bhima Bhoi's compositions the culmination of the *nirguna dha*ra (line of Nirguna thought) in Oriya religious

literature, which began with the Nath yogis and was enriched by the Vaishnavas and the Panchsakhas. Mahima Dharma granted widest circulation to the concept of a Nirguna supreme (Pradhan 1986, 235).

This blend of diverse ideas makes it difficult to place Bhima Bhoi within one particular tradition, a fact that has caused serious disagreement among scholars on his possible genealogy.[13] Rather than go into this debate, I will focus on the influence of yoga and tantra in his compositions, elements often relegated to the background in analyses of his works. As Bettina Baumer has noted, this relegation is the result of the Vedantization of Mahima Dharma by Biswanath Baba and his followers of the Joranda branch: "The more philosophical and *bhakti* aspects of his work are generally accepted, but the strong tantric current of his spirituality has been suppressed" (Baumer 2008,159).

It is in order here, as Baumer reminds us, to ask the difficult question: what is tantric? Tantra is a diffuse term that signifies as wide range of beliefs and practices across varied traditions. David Gordon White, in his introduction to Tantra in Practice, broadly defines tantra as "that Asian body of beliefs and practices which, working from the principle that the universe we experience is nothing other than the concrete manifestation of the divine energy of the Godhead that creates and maintains that universe, seeks to ritually appropriate and channel that energy, within the human microcosm, in creative and emancipatory ways" (White 2000,9).[14] Since there is no singular, well-defined way to channel divine energy within the human body, tantric idea and ritual practices remain elusive and pervasive.

It is true, however, that tantra has come to acquire a negative significance because of its close association with *shakti*- women considered to be manifestation of divine energy – as a mode of emancipation. This concept, introduced in the *Guhyasamaja Tantra* of Buddhism in the fourth century CE, lent itself to diverse apprehensions over centuries – resulting in an amalgamation, in the conception of the Absolute, of the figures of the tantric goddess Tara with the goddess Kali of the Shakta trend of Hinduism (Das 1988,27-28). Indeed, according to Paritosh Das, the Naths also

derived their inspiration from the Vajrayana branch of Buddhism, although "they Hinduized the teachings of the Buddhist Tantras" (ibid.,29). The myths related to Gorakh and Matsyendra, as indicated above, highlight the contrary pull of celibacy and sexual pleasure caused by the "Hinduization"of Buddhist tantra. Of course, not all currents of tantra advocate sexual intercourse with a ritual partner, but the association of tantra with sex has caused its negative association, the reason Baumer cites for the "suppression"of its influence on Bhima Bhoi.

Bengal and Orissa, we need to remember, were home to all the schools of Buddhist and Hindu tantra and the worship of Shakti (the Goddess). More ever, the prominence of different strands of Vaishnavism in the region meant that in Western Orissa, Bhima Bhoi was perceived as the *nityasthali* (eternal) Rādha (the lover of Krishna) and a range of Dālakahai and Rasarakeli songs, which spoke of the love of Rādha and Krishna, were ascribed to him. These songs have nothing in common with the precepts of the faith he followed. Yet they are widely held to be his creations.[15] Lay disciples find no inconsistency in the identification of Bhima Bhoi,the ideal devotee, with Rādha. For scholars, of course, it is a contradiction that requires explanation. Artaballabh Mahanti cited works believed to have been composed by Achyutānanda, one of the *Panchasakhās*, which prophesied the birth of Radha as a blind poet in Orissa. This blind poet was to propagate the teachings of the Śūnya Purusha (Void Lord), who was to appear as an abadhut.[16] Yet another scholar argued that Bhima Bhoi composed the love songs in first flush of his youth," before his initiation into Mahima Dharma: "Here is no restriction of Mahima religion, no control of the senses, no mystery of the Brahman. Drawing Rādha and Krishna into the vortex of earthly life, the poet expresses his hunger for flesh in the most nake, provocative, sensuous language" (Nayak 1984, 135-36).

Thus, Bhima Bhoi is a figure who eludes classification. His emotive chants are difficult to be contained by the dictates of any one faith, and his association with women confounds the moral norm of the celibate, ascetic preacher. While the *bhajans, stutis,* and *janans* (eulogies of and prayers to the Absolute) composed

after initiation into Mahima Dharma imbues the teachings of the founder with new meanings, his life as a householder preacher generated a host of legends which led to his deification in Western Orissa. A detailed discussion of the huge corpus of Bhima Bhoi's compositions is beyond the scope of this paper. I will provide a rough idea of the key elements in order to highlight the presence of Nath, Nirgun, and yogic-tantric ideas in them.

Bhima Bhoi's verses speak of an Absolute (Brahman), omnipresent and omniscient, who created the world out of his *mahima* (radiance, glory), but who is beyond attributes – formless and indescribable. He is the Lord of Lords, the one and only guru who had taken form and came down to earth to redeem humanity by establishing *satya dharma* (true religion). This guru is accessible to all through devotion. His worship does not require priests, temples, or pilgrimage. The pilgrim sites are located in the body: indeed, the *piṇda* (body) is a replica of the *bṛahmānda* (universe). Through proper concentration and control, one can find the Absolute in oneself. The worship of images, the mediation of priests, and rituals thus become totally redundant in the path to salvation.

According to the German scholar, Anncharlott Eschmann, Bhima Bhoi had drawn three crucial elements from the thought of the *Panchasakhas*. These were: *"the worship of the sunya, the theory of Piṇda bṛahmānda, and the idea of a future redeemer who will come and openly establish what is for the time being a secret doctrine*" (Eschmann 2008, 38). Let us pause here to reflect on the importance of the notion of *pinda-bṛahmānda*. It is clear from our brief discussions above, that the idea of the body, either as the microcosm, of the universe, or, following White, the body as the internalized representation of the universe, is derived from yoga and tantra. The basic implication here is that the body is the prime mode of realization of the Supreme Reality. This implies a further interiorization not only of the external world, but also of the mythical and religious world (Baumer 2008,162). Later schools understood this idea in different ways and worked it out through varied practices. The Buddhist Sahajiyas and the Naths, for instance, explain the state of *sahaja* (spontaneity, illumination)

as a state of perfect equilibrium in which the yogi becomes one with the whole universe. In such a state, he himself is the disciple and the preceptor (Dasgupta 1995, 196).

Many of Bhima Bhoi's works evoke the sense of a journey in which the disciple moves closer and closer to complete identification with the preceptor. The *Stuti Chintamani,* taken to be an intensely personal, autobiographical text, takes the reader along the course of Bhima Bhoi's journey, which begins with complete ignorance of the guru, passes through his initiation, and ends with his realization – by dint of devotion, meditation and contemplation – of identity with his Lord. He come to recognize the mutuality in the relationship between the guru and the *sishya (pupil),* the incompleteness of the one without the other. The all-knowing, all-prevading and all-powerful *ananta purusha* (infinite spirit, or lord) has created the *bhakta* (devotee) out of his limitless mahima to act as an instrument for the spread of true faith. The devotee complements the master; the bhakta and the guru are inseparable and interdependent, neither being superior to the other. This idea finds expression in several *padas* (couplets) or *bolis* (saying) 35,36 and 37:

It is not important who is the Guru and who the disciple.

Remember that *bhakta* and *bhagabana* form one body and eat together at the same place (*boli 35,pada 19*).

Know that the master and the disciple are one and the same,

The disciple worships the feet of the Lord; the Guru worships the disciple (*boli 36, pada11*).

As the *jiba* and *parama* lie undifferentiated in the body,

So are the minds of Guru and disciple inextricably intertwined (*boli 37, pada 1*).

It is difficult to ascertain whether this identification is linked to the sahaja state that the disciple has attained and whether the poet's journey included only practices dedicated towards spiritual advancement, or whether he also engaged in yogic practices that aimed at attaining an immutable body. What is clear, however, is Bhima Bhoi's interest in yogic practices evident in the use

of yogic-and tantric metaphors in many of his verses that underline the concept of pinda-brahmanda. These verses offer detailed descriptions of the internal landscape of the body, the ideal *tirtha* (pilgrimage site). This fits in perfectly with Bhima Bhoi's (and Mahima Dharma's) criticism of the external practices of pilgrimages and temple worship. Bettina Baumer sees in this internal integration achieved through the identification of *pinda* and *brahmanda* a close resemblance with *tantric sadhana* (religious practice) which aims at such an integration of the outer and the inner through the mediation of the body (Baumer 2008,162).

The move away from the Vedic path is reflected in the title of another important composition, the *Nirveda sadhana.* This text closely resembles those of the *Panchasakhas* in language and style and is composed in the famous *dandi matra* (a special meter) of the Oriya *Bhagabata;* it narrates the story of Anadi Prabhu (the Absolute) and his first disciple, Govinda Das, who is none other than Lord Jagannath of Puri. Indeed, Jagannath is the first to recognize *Anadi Prabhu* once he appears on earth as an *avadhuta*. Jagannath, as Govinda Das, leaves Nilachal (Puri) to become Anadi's disciple and rid himself of the sins he had acquired in his different incarnations. Govinda then goes to Bolasingha, performs *sharan* (prostration) to *Anadi* and begs him to show the way, to give him *jnana-mantra* (the formulas of wisdom) and teach him the path of *nirveda sadhana*. The steps of this *sadhana* are replete with metaphors of the yogic-tantric *sadhana*.

The first step for a true disciple is to become aware of *Arupa Brahma* (Formless God) as the supreme object of the world. This Brahma is eternal. He is free from good and evil, action and non-action. Like air, he fills the universe and permeates all objects. Brahma jnana-mantra (incantation of the knowledge of Brahma) is present in both *Veda* and in *nirveda* (non-Vedic) traditions. To acquire the mantra, the bhakta has to concentrate on the name of Brahma while infusing his mind with air and placing *jnana* (knowledge) and its five companions-*satya* (truth), kshyama (forgiveness), *sila* (good conduct), *daya* (kindness) and daksha (skill)- in his heart.

The name is an invaluable asset.

It is completely free of sins.

Sit in meditation of that name.

Blend mind and air and place the six companions in your lotus heart.[17]

The path is difficult and Govinda falters. His mind is troubled. He realizes that he has spent twelve years following the dictates of the guru that has made him suffer at the hands of gods and men, but *Anadi Prabhu* has not appeared again to give him further instructions. He decides to move toward the east, toward Kapilas, in search of his master. The guru comes to know of the doubts in the pupil's mind. *Anadi Prabhu* leaves his place, comes and meets Govinda midway, and reprimands him. He makes the disciple to go through a trial.

Govinda Das is locked inside a temple. The guru claps three times from outside and tells Govinda that he will be able to come out only if he is a proper yogi putra (son of a yogi). Govinda realizes his mistake; he sits in meditation of ekakshara (non-dual letter). He mixes his mind and air and concentrates solely on Arupa. His body becomes the ground, and the navel becomes the dhunikunda (a metal pot in which the sacred fire is lit) – Govinda lights the sacred dhuni in his navel. Anadi is pleased. He comes to the temple, releases Govinda and takes him to a mountain cave, an idyllic place on which Mother Nature has lavished all her bounties. It is here that Govinda's doubts and queries are answered, and the theory of creation explained.[18]

The recurrent suggestion of yogic practice runs all through the text, although the poet does not make it explicit. Perhaps he deliberately couched his compositions in the '*sandhya bhasha*'*(enigmatic or "twilight" language),* which bore different meanings for ascetic initiates and the lay followers. At the same time, he revealed his knowledge of the Naths and Sahajiyas by mentioning Matsyendra Nath and Gorakh Nath, and Tantipa and Haripa in the *Nirveda Sadhana.*

The *Brahma Nirupana Gita*, a difficult text of Bhima Bhoi, one that is admittedly addressed principally to the initiated ascetics, gives further indication of his knowledge and practice of yoga tantra:

The indescribable, incomprehensible Supreme resides in a place which is inaccessible to all; it is nigama bhubana, where there is no light nor darkness, neither day nor night, neither sound nor color, neither hunger nor thirst, neither creation nor destruction. There is complete cessation of all activities. It is a temple of soundlessness. Not action, nor prowess nor speech can find entry there. Even water or air cannot reach that place, which is why I call it agamya (a place which cannot be reached). There is no creation, maintenance or destruction; it is devoid of dreams and desires. (Brahma Nirupana Gita (Bhoi 1925, chapter I,padas 43-46).

This Supreme, at the same time, belongs to all; he dwells in all human bodies. The poet divides the body into several sections (chakras) from the feet up to the brain, and tries to feel the presence of the Brahma in all the parts separately.[19]

The clearest indication of Bhima Bhoi's knowledge of yogic-tantric practices appears in his *Adi Anta Gita,*a composition hardly ever recited or quoted by the followers of the faith. The text deals principally with the body as the instrument of sadhana, the repository of all the eighteen siddhis or spiritual perfections. It shows a clear influence of the *kaya sadhana* (bodily practice) of the Nath, yogis which also aimed at making the body immortal (Dasgupta 1995, 218,219,228,234). At one place in the text, Bhima Bhoi states clearly: "*The birth is difficult to attain. The body will not be destroyed. It is called indestructible and immortal.*"[20]

A Baumer notes: "*Obviously, this knowledge is the very secret of micro-macrocosmic relationship or pinda-brahmanda, which only the saints can realize*" (Baumer 2008, 163-64). As mentioned before, Bhima Bhoi's description of the *chakras* and the yogic body and mixing of ascent and descent through the *chakras* do not conform to standard yogic descriptions. A careful and systematic analysis of the relevant passages and allusions is required, affirms Baumer, in order to decide whether this apparently

unsystematic treatment corresponds to his personal experience or it is just an expression of his poetic freedom. At the same time, his familiarity with the yogic path is unquestionable. The *Adi Anta Gita* describes the path leading to the formless Absolute as *asadhana marga* (a path without any means, a pathless path). This is very much in tune with the highest means described in the *advayavada* (non-dualism) of Kashmir Saivism. In his *Bhajanamala* and *Brahmanirupana Gita,* Bhima Bhoi defines the road to illumination as *anupaya* (ibid.).

Let me now turn to another feature of the *Adi Anta Gita,* one that relates to the use of sexual symbolism. Like most of Bhima Bhoi's other compositions, the verses here recount a dialogue between jiva and parama, the soul and the Supreme. What is interesting is that the jiva here is represented as a *yuvati* (a young girl), and parama as a male. At the same time, jiva is also the disciple, Bhima Bhoi, and parama his guru, Mahima Swami. Apart from the fact that the assumption of the female voice is a practice prevalent among the nirguni sants and Vaishnavas, Bhima Bhoi's representation of himself, the devotee, as a *yuvati*, goes perfectly well with the belief that he was eternal Radhā. The union of the jiva and the parama, thus has to be understood as a union on three different planes: the union of man and woman; the soul and the Supreme, and the disciple and the preceptor. Once again, we come back to the use of the *sandhya-bhasa*, the multi-layered language common in tantric texts.

Finally, let us link this use of tantric metaphors and sexual symbolism with Bhima Bhoi's life of a householder where he cohabited with four women.[21] One is widely regarded as his spiritual consort, while he fathered children with two others. The tension these relations caused among the renouncers of Mahima Dharma occasioned a division between the ascetics and Bhima Bhoi, and later, between two groups of ascetics. The dominant group attempted to suppress the tantric elements in Bhima Bhoi's poetry and marginalize him as a householder devotee, not a preacher. But the confusions continued and found expression in the wide variety of legends around Bhima Bhoi.

To conclude, this paper has attempted to highlight not only the common origins of yoga and tantra and their very close association with the naths, but also the persistence of their mixed expressions in a wide range of later traditions coming down to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Through a focus on Mahima Dharma and its founder and poet - philosopher, I have tried to show that the tensions reflected in the legends around Matsyendra and Gorakh with regard to association with women are replicated in the stories of Bhima Bhoi and *Mahima Swami.* In other words, despite repeated efforts at upholding celibacy as a key element of asceticism within dominant Hinduism, and the marking off of yoga from tantra on grounds of yoga's distance from women and sexual practices, the separation between yoga and tantra has neither been final nor complete. The continued expression of their separation finds new significance in the different ways they are understood, appropriated, and worked out in practices of varied religious orders. It is time perhaps to pay greater attention into these combined articulations in order to understand the great hold of the overlapping yoga-tantra traditions rather than to look at them as deviations or distortions from the norm.

End Notes:

1. *Utkala Deepika*, June 1, 1867, part 2, no. 22.

2. The new faith drew the attention of the colonial government on account of the dramatic effort of a few of its lay followers on March 1, 1881, to enter the temple of Puri and drag out and burn the images of the Jagannath trinity. Following the incident, detailed enquiries were ordered into the beliefs and practices of the faith by the Commissioner of the Orissa Division. The *tehsildars* (revenue collectors) of Angul and Banki, the Manager of Dhenkanal and the Superintendent of Sambalpur all submitted reports to the Commissioner who incorporated them in his report to the Government of Bengal. The accounts of the local officers were filed in the Records of the Board of Revenue, while the report of the Commissioner was published under the title "On the origin and growth of the sect of Hindu dissenters who profess to be the followers of Alekh" in the *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal 1882*.

3. Report of the Commissioner of the Orissa Division, Board of Revenue document no. 445/1, Orissa State Archives, Bhubaneswar.

4. Cf. especially chapters 3 and 5; see also Muñoz's essay in this volume.

5. I thank David Lorenzen for providing me with this very valuable reference.

6. Once again, I thank David Lorenzen for this reference.

7. Reports of the *tehsildars* of Angul and Banki, Board of Revenue Documents nos. 443, 441/1, Orissa State Archives, Bhubaneswar. These reports also mention 1866 as the year of its construction.

8. Pers. comm. (Kasinath Baba).

9. Pers. comm. (Bhagaban Dāsa and others).

10. Pers. comm. (Biswanath Baba).

11. The five mystics were: Balaram Dāsa, Jagannatha Dāsa, Achyuta(nanda) Dāsa, Ananta Dāsa, and Yasobanta Dāsa.

12. For a detailed discussion see Banerjee-Dube, "Taming Traditions: Legalities and Histories in Twentieth-Century Orissa" in Gautam Bhadra et al 1999: 98–125; see also Banerjee-Dube 2007, chapter 3.

13. For a detailed and critical discussion of Bhima Bhoi's works and ideas see Banerjee-Dube 2007, chapter 3.

14. It is interesting that in his chapter in this volume, White rejects the idea of the body as the microcosm or miniature of the universe, arguing instead that the universe is macranthropic, that is, it has a human form. The body represents the entire universe within it. See "On the Magnitude of the Yogic Body" in this book.

15. Ramesh Samantarai (1976) quotes a phrase current in Western Orissa, which asks a blind man to compose Dalakhai and Rasarakheli for the people to sing, to argue that this blind man is none other than Bhima Bhoi.

16. See Artaballabh Mahanti, foreword to Bhima Bhoi's *Stutichintamani* (Bhoi 1925).

17. *Namati amulya ratana Na lage papa dosamana Sehi namaku kara dhyanamisai e mana paban chhada janaku eka mele Sthapibu e hrudaya kamale.* (Nirveda Sadhana, chapter 2).

18. The theory of creation is elaborated in *Nirveda sadhana,* chapters 5 to 15.

19. It has been argued that Bhima Bhoi's division of the body into chakras was different from the yogic division. The chakras enumerated by the poet were greater in number than the six—*sada chakra*—used in yoga. The names he gave to them were also different. See Balakrushna Misra. 1981, Brahma nirupana gitare brahmanka sthiti bichara. *Saptarshi* (Sambalpur University Journal) 78: 61–66. On the other hand, Daitari Baba, a *sanyasi* of the Kaupindhari *samaj*, who prepared a schematic pictorial division of the different parts of the body as discussed in Bhima Bhoi, showed that they corresponded with yogic divisions. Daitari Baba gave me a copy of this pictorial division when I met him in 1990.

20. Bhima Bhoi, *Adi Anta Gita*, 13, cited in Bäumer 2008, 163.

21. For a detailed discussion see Johannes Beltz and Kedar Mishra, Ascetic, Layman or Rebellious Guru? Bhima Bhoi and his Female Consorts, in Baner-jee-Dube and Beltz 2008, 131–58.

Bhima Bhoi : Sentient Humanist

Priyadarshi Bahinipati

Bhima Bhoi was born probably in 1850 and died in 1895 and was a congenital blind. He spent his childhood in tending cattle for a living. "The contact of MahimāSwāmi with Bhima Bhoi seems to have sparked the dormant genius of this illiterate young tribal and turned the servant boy into an inspired poet which was a matter of great significance in the entire field of Indian literature".[1]

After his initiation into the Mahimā Dharma by MahimāSwāmi in 1863, he became a loyal follower unto his last. He adhered to *Gṛuhi sect* follower which is known from many of his writings.

His writings are the mirror of the society of his times which reflects the true picture of an amorphous state where everything was in quandary. He always craved for social reconstruction and human transgression for the achievement of a society based on reason and conscience. His compositions that contain his ideologies were such expositions which all men could take to themselves, and they were expounded with such force and imagination, and buttressed with such simple emotional appeals and eternal truths, that the aggrieved and frustrated could catch fire from their fervour, find encouragement in their protest, hope in their promise, and weapon in their armoury. Those writings of his, which were founded on the perceptions of Mahimā Swāmi, preached in 'original goodness' a simple and redemptive answer to the question of original sin. They were the passionate cry of the common people for their birthright i.e. equality, fraternity and social justice – in this world.

His revolutionary and reformist thoughts were ingrained in this composition. Through it, the poet attempted to create social consciousness against the invidious caste distinctions, oppressions, religious inequalities that were rampant in the society.

He had repeatedly urged the rulers, ruled and the powerful alike not to commit injustice and oppression, but, no one paid any heed to his words. For this Bhima Bhoi in deep anguish expressed,

*"Jagatabhitare samsāra hitare bakhānili kavikruta,
Jete bujhāili nabujhilekehi kopakariapramita"*[2]

[Within this world for its welfare I have composed poetry,
In intense anger nobody understood as much as I explained.]

*"Panchabutaātmā dagdhahoichi jibanakanduchhiniti,
Anyāyasamsāra anitiāchāra ehi kali juga riti"*[3]
*"Bujhāili jete nagaleparate bharasānāhinā mora,
E jagatajana sarbehatajnāna helenimātipathara"*[4]

[As much as I explained no one believed me because they have no faith in me. Senseless, the people of this world are becoming sand and stone.]

The devaluation of social values, degeneration of religious practices and social discrimination had disappointed and agonized him to such an extent that he prayed to God to save this earth in these words-

*"Dharani dharasambhāli sustakara nohilebhāsilānische,
Dubilāsamsāra janāilānāhin naboliba mote pachhe"*[5]

[Save the world make it well off or else ruination will be imminent. O' Lord I shall not be reproached later for not letting you know about the danger.]

The saint poet aspired to build a new world by dismantling the existing one, but what he needed for this was the grace of God. If Mahimā Prabhu blessed him he would be successful in his venture and revolt against the maligned world. This desire he expressed in these words –

*"Naba khanda mahi thāliprāya hoi hejilemanakuase;
E mora netraku chhapanakotijiva tiranaparāyedise.
Ekādivasare khyanakabhitare dyantipruthiwileutāi,
Dāntakāmudi ki buddhikaribi srigurunkaājnānāhin"*[6]

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2 *Stuti Chintamani*, Boli –34/12, p. 68
3 *Ibid*, Boli – 35/11, p. 70
4 *Ibid*, Boli – 26/12, p. 52
5 *Ibid*, Boli – 43/16, p. 86
6 *Ibid*, Boli – 26/16, 17, p.52 [Trans: Sitakanta Mohapatra, Op. Cit., p. 33]

[When I perceive, the nine worlds come to my mind in the shape of a plate, and the fifty six crore of living beings appear like a blade of grass. I could overturn the earth in one day in a moment,

But I only clench my teeth and refrain since I do not have the divine command of the Lord.]

The saint-poet aimed for a healthy and peaceful society where the mankind can live in love, happiness, tenderness and devotion. In every age the saints and reformers raised their voices against casteism and social discriminations. For them, there is one caste, that is humankind, one religion that is humanity, since all originated from the same *Brahman*. Mahimā Dharma does not believe in caste distinction, as it adheres to the simple but significant saying of Bhima Bhoi – "*Jātikhojile mukti nāhin; Mukti Khojile jāti nāhin* (There is no deliverance for a caste conscious man and no caste for a seeker of deliverance). Pertaining to the class and caste distinctions in the contemporary society Bhima Bhoi expresses in pain and discontent –

> "*Chhatisa kula je baunapātaka jātibolānāhinjāe,*
> *Pāniantarapātaka sināe husupanditakar anyāya.*
> *Tinibrahmāndare lodiāsatumbhe ekajana eka jati,*
> *Sehisabunku sātajāti karichhi tāhāra rachilāpruthivi*"[7]

[Thirty-six races, fifty-two sub-castes cannot be called class. Let the wise men do the justice by treating the differences as thin as water.]

The aim of Bhima Bhoi was to create a broader social framework by dismantling the barriers where justice, equality, fraternity would be supreme and where there will be no caste and class distinctions. Therefore, he advised –

> "*Chhtisa kula bāuna je pātaka je achhistiri purusha,*
> *Uchhanichabolibāranamakarināma re saranapasa*"[8]

7 *Ibid*, Boli – 70/12,13, p. 140
8 *Ibid*, Boli , 92/1, p. 183

[All men and women belonging to thirty-six races and fifty-two sub-castes should take refuge in the name of the almighty, getting rid of any superior and inferior complexity.]

He is of the opinion that the caste and class distinctions are basically man-made which is unpardonable. For their own benefits the so-called guardians of religion had divided the society on the basis of caste. If all are the children of *Brahman* as such, how will they differ from one another? In order to raise mass consciousness against such man-made discriminatory approach he wielded the pen to expose the hypocrisy. All the people belonging to any profession should worship the *Brahman* and should view all impartially without any race, caste and colour distinction. This attitude of the saint-poet is symbolic of his universal love and cosmopolitan character.

To remove the stains from the society that had stigmatized it, to make way for new currents of hope, faith and aspiration was the clarion call of this ascetic observer. He considered that the dissimilarities, inequality, deceit in thought, belief and action had to be uprooted from the society for the sake of peace, progress and stability.

His concern for the entire humanity which may be held as the essence of the *Mahimā* cult can be judged from the oft quoted celebrated lines he composed:

> *"Prāninkaārata dukhaapramita dekhu dekhu kebāsahu,*
> *Mo jibanapachhe narke padithāu jagata uddhāraheu."*[9]

[Boundless is the anguish and misery of the living who can see it and tolerate, Let my soul be condemned to hell, but the universe be redeemed.]

Bhima Bhoi was not only a non-conformist and a protestor but also a reformer of great stature, who, through his writings tried to present the stark realities before the people and suggested ways to alleviate their sufferings. In a dervish like manner through his sentience, he prognosticated before the people the possibility of a cataclysm if they deviated and went astray from the path of truth

9 *Stuti Chintamani*, Boli – 27/7, p. 53

and justice. His insatiable urge for the uplift of the mankind, his commiseration for the poor and indigent prompted him to come to their rescue through mental and spiritual elevation. For their deliverance, he acted as a friend, philosopher and guide to them throughout his life. There is no hiatus between his action and deeds. As he himself had experienced the worldly sufferings, he could very well understand the pain and anguish of the people of the world. This is quite clear when he asked god for the reason of his suffering in these words –

*"Prāninkakasana bheduachhi mana jibanaku mora bādhe,
Bhima arakshita karidandabata kārana māguchhi pāde."*[10]

[The suffering of the living is piercing my heart and gives me great pain. O' Lord, the helpless Bhima beseeching at your feet asking for the reason.]

This type of self-dedication, self-mortification and humility is a rare example in world literature. It is the reflection of the worldly-love of this sympathetic, sensitive poet of the people and which is much in line with the age old saying of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*. "Bhima Bhoi's notion of salvation is thought in terms of liberation from degenerate, exploitative socio-religious system and establishment of the humanity on the ideals of universal love and co-existence. He does not obviously acknowledge a disconnect between theory and practice. His vision of unity of all existence entails a life of action and the ethics of live and let live. One can find a striking similarity of Bhima Bhoi's philosophical ideas with the views of Vivekananda when he says – When a man has reached the highest, when he sees neither man no woman, neither sex nor creed, nor colour nor birth, nor any of these differentiations, but goes beyond and finds that divinity which is the real man behind every human being, then only he has reached the universal brotherhood and that man only is the Vedantist."[11]

10 *Stuti Chintamani*, Boli – 26/20, p. 52
11 S. C. Panigrahi, *Bhima Bhoi and Mahima Darsana*, Santosh Publication, Cuttack, 1998, pp. 68, 69

He says –

> *"Dharma dhāranedhar atirahichhi chārijugare*
> *Sānta sila dayā kshyamā ehāpālibe je jana*
> *Ātmāchinhi anna dāna dele basahebatāre*
> *Nāmare sarana jāajiba pare dayābaha*
> *E dharma ru sāra āunāhinnā e samsāre."*[12]

The above stanzas reflect the poet's sentimental appeal. What else is a more virtuous deed than offering food to the hungry? In his opinion humanity blooms in ministering to the people with a benevolent and philanthropic intention and also in expressing piety for the living being with an impulse of love, compassion and fellow-feeling. The mark of a real human being can be found in these worthy deeds. This was the ultimate goal of a humanist poet with unceasing concern for the upliftment of the society.

12 Bhima Bhoi, *Bhajana mālā,* 38/1,2, p. 32

Bhima Bhoi's Poetic Vision : An Overview

Dhaneswar Sahoo

Bhima Bhoi is an illustrious poet of Odia literature. He is also the main advocate of a religious cult, called *Mahima Dharma*, founded by *Mahima Swami* or *Mahima Gosain. Mahima Swami* and Bhima Bhoi belonged to the 19th century. *Mahima Swami* is the founder of *Mahima Dharma* but has left no literature to his credit. He preached this religious cult orally among his disciples. He is supposed to be a God-incarnate by his disciples. Many myths, legends and miracles are attributed to *Mahima Swami.* The life-story of *Mahima Swami* and Bhim Bhoi is shrouded in mystery. Historians and researchers are certain on the point that *Mahima Swami* passed away at Joranda, in the district of Dhenkanal, in 1876 and Bhima Bhoi breathed his last in 1895. Nothing is known about the parentage or place of birth of *Swami.* About the birth of Bhima Bhoi different historians give different years. It is presumed that he was born within 1846 to 1855. Nothing is known about his parentage. Janardan Bhoi and Maharagi, the Kandha couple, were not his biological parents. They found him when he was a baby, abandoned by his real mother whose identity is not known. The Bhoi couple rescued the baby and nourished him as their son. Regarding the blindness of Bhima, there is also difference of opinion. Some consider him to be born-blind and others take him to be blind at a later age. Because Bhima was a cow-herd in his young days, he was not, it is presumed, a blind person by birth. Even some hold that he was not physically blind but blind only in a metaphorical sense for not being an enlightened person. He had no formal education but had basic knowledge of the Hindu scriptures and mythologies. Bhima is described as a saint-poet as he has composed hundreds of devotional verses. He is considered as a creative genius. But he was a married person and not an ascetic

Some writers maintain that Bhima's creative ability blossomed after his meeting with his master, *Mahima Swami. Mahima*

Swami, supposed to be God-incarnate, touched him and blessed him. After this meeting with *Mahima Swami*, Bhima turned to be a great poet as poetry spontaneously flowed from his mind. Bhima Bhoi himself has admitted that because of his master's grace he could be able to compose the devotional verses. He has composed hundreds of verses, devotional poems, verses with metaphysical significance, prayers, philosophical songs etc. *Mahima Swami* though preached a new religious faith he did it by oral instruction which were transmitted from generation to generation. But the works of Bhima Bhoi are taken as the basic treatises of *Mahima Dharma*. Bhima's works* like *Stuti Chintamani, Bhajana Mala, Brahma Nirupana Geeta, Adianta Geeta, Astakabihari Geeta, Chautisha Granthamala, Nirveda Sadhana* etc. are the most captivating texts of this religion. All these compositions are in form of poetry. Bhima's literary works reflect his poetic ability and his innate creative talent. But the poet with his humble modesty confesses that he is an ignorant and stupid person. What he composes comes to him from his merciful master. He is just a medium to record what is being revealed to him. Not only Bhima Bhoi but also many great literary figures in the past have made such confessions that what they have written has been the result of some divine mercy. That was the humility of the great literary artists in the past. Bhima belongs to such a tradition and expresses this cultural ethos as he is brought up in a marginalized tribal family. Further the basic principles of *Mahima Dharma* as instructed or preached by *Mahima Swami* get reflected in the writings of Bhima. Bhima Bhoi's writings are considered by the followers of *Mahima Dharma* as the reliable literature of the cult as no other literary work of the cult existed beforehand. So *Mahima Swami* and Bhima Bhoi are acclaimed as the founder and exponent of the cult respectively in Odisha.

Any study or elucidation of a world religion reveals that it has a history, founder or fundamental scripture or both, some metaphysical doctrines, rituals, some ethical ideals and legends, stories, fables etc. associated with it. *Mahima Dharma* is no exception to it as it has all these characteristics. Though it is the youngest religion in the world, it has its founder, some theological doctrines consisting its core beliefs, some moral

norms, ritualistic practices and in course of time some sects. Like other religions in the world, it also arose as a cultural renaissance to ameliorate human society and remove some social evils. *Mahima Swami*, supposed to be God-incarnate by his followers, wanted to annihilate different evils and to elevate social morals for a righteous living. *Mahima Swami*, as the founder of *Mahima Dharma*, preached its principles orally and has left no literature to his credit. But his ardent disciple Bhima Bhoi has left a dearth of literary works regarding the ideas, principles and morals of the cult. It became a practicing religious faith as many people adhered to this religious ideal. It is not the purpose of the paper to present a comprehensive picture of *Mahima Dharma* and its ideals. But my intention here is to deal with the poetic vision of Bhima Bhoi as all his writings are in form of poetry. Again his poetry mostly consists of prayer verses that present the philosophy of *Mahima Dharma*. Interestingly *Dharma* or religion, philosophy and poetry are all mixed up or mingled with one another in Bhima Bhoi's works. But modern analysis shows that *Dharma* (understood in the sense of religion), philosophy and poetry are conceptually distinct from one another. Each of them expresses man's creativity and ability to invent new and original ideas. In the history of civilizations so many original ideas and ideals have been developed artistically. This artistic creativity in philosophy, poetry and religion has helped mankind to develop both morally and intellectually. But even though philosophy, religion and poetry in their own ways have given rise to new, imaginative and original ideas they are conceptually different from one another in some way or other.

Philosophy, one of the ancient intellectual disciplines, is understood in a technical sense in contemporary idiom. Once upon a time philosophy was supposed to give knowledge of the highest order and of the absolute Reality. Metaphysics had an honourable place in philosophic pursuit. Philosophy was open to any enquiry that raises questions about reality that transcends science. But the concept of philosophy was changed when there was hostility to metaphysics as metaphysical knowledge was considered to be non-cognitive in the twentieth century. Philosophy in the contemporary period is considered to be a reflective enquiry or

second order activity aiming to give conceptual clarity. Philosophy is, modern thinkers hold, a clarificatory analysis based on critical thinking. It has nothing to do with transcendental speculation or metaphysical imagination, rather it exposes the conceptual oddity or revision involved in such comprehensions. Gone is the age of revisionary metaphysics is the present day understanding of philosophy.

In the contemporary period religion is studied from different perspectives. Religion as a matter of social institution is studied by historians, sociologists, psychologists and philosophers. These studies lay bare the conceptual framework associated with religious ideas and ideals. Every religion, analysis shows, consists of some theological doctrines, rituals, morals and various beliefs and legends that go with it. Every religion gives a speculative rendering of the origin of the world, destiny of human life, cause of human suffering, a theodicy so on and so forth. Every religion, by and large, is based on some theological doctrines, that constitute its core beliefs along with some prescriptions and proscriptions for leading a meaningful life. It keeps before people some spiritual ideals to be pursed so as to reach the destiny of life. Every religion has established a cultural bond among a people for adhering to some common ideals. Religion can be helpful to the society in establishing social solidarity among a people. At the same time religion can be harmful to the society if it promotes blind beliefs or gives rise to communal passions.

Literature is the linguistic manifestation of creativity in different forms such as poetry, novel, play, story etc.. Particularly poetry is the artistic written works expressed by a creative genius in emotive language. It is the artistic expression of feelings and emotions in rhythmic way. A poet uses similes, metaphors, images or symbols to express emotions. A good piece of poetry creates emotional response in the reader. A good poem carries lofty imagination and pleasing emotion by its artistic rhythm. So the language of poetry is emotive as its utterances create feelings and attitudes. Language has the plasticity to be used for very many purposes. Language of philosophy is reflective or analytical, the language of science is descriptive or judgmental and the language of poetry

is emotive and rhythmical. The language of poetry is neither descriptive nor reflective but it elicits favourable or unfavourable feeling or emotion in the readers.

It appears that the universe of discourse of philosophy, religion and poetry is different from one another. But there is fusion of religion and philosophy in the poetry of Bhima Bhoi. Bhima Bhoi was basically a poet and adhered to a religious order. So his religious faith and the theological doctrines of that faith get primacy in his poetic vision. His poetic vision is governed by his religious faith. A sense of devotion to the almighty '*Alekha*' dominates his poetic apparition or imagination. *Alekha* is the almighty Brahman, the *causasui*. Bhim Bhoi's two magnum opus poetry "*Stuti Chintamani*" and "*Brahma Nirupan Geeta*" present his view of the absolute or the ultimate reality. The ultimate reality is otherwise called *Mahima*. *Mahima, Alekh, Śūnya* and the Absolute are used somewhat synonymously in par with the concept of Brahman of the *Advaita Vedanta*. *Mahima* is the *Śūnya Brahman* as it transcends any description or determination. In numerous verses of Bhima Bhoi the absolute Reality or Brahman is described as '*Mahima*'. *Mahima* is addressed as '*Alekha*' which signifies that it can never be empirically determined or described. *Mahima* is *Śūnya* in the sense that it is devoid of any attribute, form or description. Further *Mahima* is the ex-nihilo creator of the world, and the world of individual souls or jivas. The souls after being created remain separate from *Mahima* for temporary phase till they merge with *Mahima*. By realizing *Mahima* as the absolute reality the individual jiva becomes identified with the Alekh. Till that the jiva remains separated from *Mahima*, the absolute Reality. All these metaphysical ideas are only gross assumptions based on feeling and imagination. Bhima Bhoi presents metaphysical speculations in his poetry. No reasoning is attributed to justify all these speculative belief such as the nature of *Mahima*, nature of human soul, relation of soul with *Mahima* and human liberation. Poetry becomes the basis to describe the theological doctrines upon which *Mahima Dharma* is founded.

Bhima Bhoi's work *"Bhajanamala"* published in two volumes consists of 309 devotional songs. His prayer verses are very popular in Odisha for their melodious rhythm and devotional appeal. In his devotional songs he describes *Alekha* as an immanent reality. He presents a pantheistic view of God as the almighty, is manifested in all beings, living or non-living. The Sunya Brahman pervades the whole universe. Bhima Bhoi in his devotional songs sings the glory of *Mahima Alekha. Mahima* can be attained only by sincere devotion. He gives primacy to devotion for the purification of the heart. By sincere devotion to *Mahima Alekha*, the elevation of the soul is possible so as to achieve a blissful state. In Indian spiritual tradition knowledge, action and devotion *(jnana, karma and bhakti)* are emphasized for achievement of the ultimate goal of life. Among the three paths devotion is given pivotal place in the poetry of Bhima Bhoi. There are sorrows, suffering and evil in the world. Individual life is mixed with many sorrowful states. To overcome sorrow and suffering and to get release from the world of evil there is no other way than to submit oneself to *Mahima*. Self-surrender is the basic notion in having true devotion to *Alekha* or God. God-realization through devotion is considered to be the essence of the devotional verses of Bhima Bhoi.

The real worth of life lies in the elevation of the soul to achieve the sublime bliss. Such a state is achievable only by surrender and devotion to the almighty, *Alekha*. To be worthy of divine grace one has to consecrate his life to the almighty *Alekha* with devotion. The sense of consecration, surrender and devotion to *Alekha* makes life worth-living. The devotional songs sing the glory of the Lord *Mahima*. The Lord is the omnipotent and omniscient *Mahima* who reigns the world. By living a life of piety one can overcome all worldly miseries so as to get the blessing of *Mahima Alekha*. Most of the verses in his *Bhajanamala* are overloaded with the glory of *Mahima Alekha* and our sense of devotion to the Lord. He takes devotion as one of the highest values of life. Bhima Bhoi is guided by a passionate zeal to pray the Lord who is supreme in his view.

Here an inconsistency is supposed to crop up. Once the ultimate Reality is described as Sunya, *Alekha* or attributeless - indetermininate Brahman, how can *Mahima* be the object of devotion. Since there is no idea of personal God in *Mahima Dharma*, the idea of devotion, surrender or consecration would carry no significance. To this problem *Mahima Dharma* has a solution of its own. As long as the individual self is separated from the ultimate one that is *Alekha*, there is need of devotion for the union. In other words, so long as the practical distinction between the individual soul and the supreme soul does exist, there is practical need for the lower self to consecrate to the higher self, *Mahima*. Just as in *Advaita Vedanta* there is distinction between Iswar and Brahman, so also a similar distinction is found in *Mahima Dharma* to overcome the inconsistency. Despite this apparent similarity between *Advaita* view and *Mahima Dharma*, there is conspicuous difference between the two systems. The metaphysical position of *Advaita* does not admit the reality of Jiva or God. But in *Mahima Dharma* some reality is attributed to the individual self. *Mahima*, the absolute, is indeterminable and so to say incomprehensible. Despite this description Bhima Bhoi identifies God with the absolute Reality, *Mahima*, there is a fusion of metaphysical notion with religious attitude. Further unlike *Advaita Vedanta*, *Mahima Dharma* takes the world as a creation and not a cosmic illusion or Maya. In this respect *Mahima Dharma* would be akin to Visistadwaita system of Ramanuja. Bhima Bhoi in his numerous poems sings the glory of *Mahima Alekha* and expresses devotion to the Lord as the indispensable way to realize God and attain a state of bliss. Later writers have brought out the metaphysical and the doctrinal presumptions of *Mahima Dharma* but Bhima Bhoi emotionally expresses his feeling as an ardent devotee.

Bhima Bhoi's greatest glory lies in his humanistic vision of life. In some of his poems he expresses his anguish to see the misery, distress and suffering of the people. As a poet he was a morally sensitive person and was deeply moved to see the misery, agony and anguish of the people. Human suffering may be due to prevailing social evils or an account of man's bad deeds in the past. In some of his poems he takes his past deeds as the

cause of his present suffering. He opines that only *Mahima* can remove his ills and miscarries. Further as a great humanist he desires for collective liberation of humanity. Even he proclaims that he is prepared to suffer in the hell if that would redeem the misery and grief of humanity. He wants a delightful humanity where happiness, by and large, will prevail in the society. He had the realization that one can live a happy life if happiness prevails in the collective ethos of the society. This feeling of oneness with the society is a humanistic sentiment that finds an explicit expression in his numerous poems.

In his contemporary period there prevailed many social evils. Observing the social ills and evils he expressed his anguish and opined to annihilate them. Social discriminations, caste system and untouchability were vogue in his days. To treat people as high and low expresses human ignorance. A spiritually elevated person sees all to be equal. He visualizes the divine spark in every person. All men are equal before the Lord and there is no discrimination among the people. This idea is repeatedly expressed in his poems. He speaks of the spiritual unity of humanity. This can be characterized as 'spiritual humanism'. Such a vision is inherently present in his poetry.

In numerous poems Bhima Bhoi has expressed his spiritual vision how he has dedicated his life to the mercy of Lord *Alekha*. Despite many a suffering in life he is not deviated from his path of devotion. Wholeheartedly he sings the glory of the Lord to mitigate his suffering. In this way he expresses his disapproval of any idol worship. Idols are man-made lifeless images. Such idols have nothing to do with our prayer or worship. This is sheer foolishness to adore lifeless idols. Further *Mahima Dharma* discards polytheism. The idea of many gods and goddesses is a superstitious notion. Bhima Bhoi in his poetry propounds monotheism. The ritualistic practices associated with idol-worship or polytheism is not acceptable to the *Mahimites*.

Bhima Bhoi in many of his poems expresses a desire of creating a society of moral persons. He emphasizes upon the value of moral ideals as a need to spiritual life. Nobody can lead a spiritual life without following the moral ideals in practical life. In his own

way he insists upon the ethical values as the first step to make spiritual progress. Bhim Bhoi has prescribed a code of conduct for a house-holder and even for a Sannyasi. In *Mahima Dharma* there are different monastic orders among the *Sannyasis* on the basis of their experience, dedication and *Sadhana*. Those who become Sannyasi have to live a life of renunciation. After their initiation they become *Sadhu Vairagi* and live an ascetic life. Then a *Sadhu Vairagi* becomes an *Apara Sannyasi*. In the monastic order the last stage is *Para Sannyasi*. These are the three stages in the monastic order. Whether someone is a house-holder or man of renunciation everyone has to follow some moral code to conduct his life. For the *Sannyasis* strict discipline is prescribed in the Monastic order. But for an average common man there are prescriptions what one ought to do and proscriptions what one should not do. Violence, stealing and greed are to be avoided by all people in the practical life. Violence, cruelty, falsehood, stealing, uncontrolled passions like adultery etc. are proscribed as immoral for all people as they are obstacle to spiritual progress. In *Stuti Chintamani, Bhajanamala* and other works there are many verses in which Bhima gives the message of moral ideals to be practiced by everyone. Without adhering to the moral path one cannot live a meaningful life. Morality is a sin qua non, Bhima Bhoi preaches, for a righteous living.

Throughout his poetic expressions there is a basic idea which is widespread in Bhima Bhoi's poetry. He believes that there is a supernatural power, called *Mahima Alekha*, and *Mahima*'s active role in all human affairs. He further believe that the conscious subordination of man to this divine power would make life worth-living. He is intensely religious and to a large extent other-worldly. Like most of the organized religions, he gives the message that dedication to *Mahima* is the way to reach God. Morality is not a social need, but has its basis in divine will. So basically Bhima Bhoi is a religious humanist. Besides, his poetic vision has some social ideals too. He is against some evils which create social discrimination. His opposition to polytheism and idol-worship is note-worthy for he thinks that that would be helpful for a superstition-free society. The pursuance of such ideals is supposed to cleanse social life for a radical transformation of

society. He had the firm faith that by adhering to the path of *Mahima Dharma* a cultural renaissance is supposed to evolve. In striving to bring a cultural renaissance he made poetry as the medium to spread the message of a new religion. This new religion was supposed to give rise to a morally better society. Despite all these social objectives his poetry is overshadowed by mysticism and metaphysical speculations. Of course in poetry it is natural to find the imaginative experience of the artist. Bhima Bhoi's poetry gives some powerful insights into the basic ideals of *Mahima Dharma* . He attempts to describe the indescribable and evokes emotion and imagination. One can notice the glimpse of emotion, imagination and experience of his artistry. The content of his artistry has become very popular for its rhythmic, musical and melodious glamour. It is not desirable to uncover the logical or rational elements in his notion of *Mahima Dharma*[**] and its philosophy[***]. He is basically a poet and in his artistry one can find the interplay of words giving an aesthetic and rhythmic feeling. Though his poetry gives a religious message, at the same time it also depicts human situation and misery in real situations of life. The poet's feeling of humaneness leaves a universal message of empathy and sympathy for the whole of humanity. Hence his poetry depicts a humanistic vision. Though Bhima Bhoi comes from a marginalized tribal community he has occupied an immortal position in Odia literature.

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Search for The Supreme Reality - A Study of Bhima Bhoi's Poetic Vision

Dr.Chittaranjan Misra

Saint poetry has a glorious tradition in India in general and Odisha in particular. In this context we remember Kabir, Namdev, Eknath, Gyandev, Chaitanya, Shankardev, Tukaram and many others. In the context of Odisha we know the contribution of poets like Jagannath Das, Balaram Das, Sarala Das, Achyutananda Das, Bhima Bhoi, Kavisurya Baladeba Rath, Gopal Krushna, Dinakrushna to literature of devotion. The beginning of poetry on theory of Creation, God, devotion and liberation of man can be traced back to religious upheaval of the 6th century B.C. and the spread of Buddhism.

Manasinha says: "The spirit and content of these Buddhist poems keep coming up again and again, age after age, in an almost continuous process, symbolising the eternal undercurrent in the Oriya culture of the Natha-Mahayanic philosophy of life. The *Charya Padas* of 7th-9th centuries, the *Sisu Veda* of the 14th, the works of the Panchasakhas in the 15th, *Mahimandala Gita* of Arakshita Dasa in the 17th, the Bhajanas of Bhima Bhoi in the 18th and the poems of Madhusudan Rao in the 19th century make a continuous and consistent record of the manifestation of the deep, genuine religious feelings of the Oriya people." (Mansinha.1962.27)

But neither the ancientness nor the contribution of poet-saints of later periods are visible in the Pan-Indian critical writings across disciplines like history and literary criticism. Dr.Nishamani Kar as rightly explores the cause: "The saint-poets; the major figures in the cultural history of Odisha, are but little known outside the state - a fact that throws into sharp relief the inadequacies of Indian historiography and the political marginalisation of Odishan culture. Paradoxically enough, the Odishan situation is but another sub-set of the pan-Indian socio-politico-religious praxis."(Kar.2014.68)

The ruins of Buddhist monasteries and viharas at Ratnagiri, Lalitgiri and Udayagiri of Odisha bear evidence to the genesis of a spiritual discourse and its ancientness. The religious tradition embodied in Odia poetry cannot be conceived as insulated from that. The revival of Hindu faith installed Sanskrit as the language of religion and literature and poetry of common language that grew with Buddhism found its sustenance in remote and rural cultures. But it is a fact that the synthesis of Buddhism and Brahmanism enriched Odia literature in succeeding periods. Just as the cult of Jagannath accommodates tribal antecedents within Brahminic folds Odia poetry too has been a confluence of the popular and the elite. We have the erudite rich diction of Upendra Bhanja, the prince turned poet on the one hand and Sarala Dasa, the peasant turned poet on the other who transformed the story of Mahabharata in consonance with lived reality of his times.

Bhima Bhoi connects us with the worship of *Sunya*, the void which is reminiscent of the Mahayana Buddhist practices in ancient Odisha. His vision of life is seen as a resurfacing of the wisdom of the wandering monks like the Nathas who were singing bhajans and propagating their spiritual understanding through poetry. His poetry has come to be studied on the ground of its resistance against domination of Brahminism and rituals. He is seen as a rebellious prophet who had a social vision. As a representative of the poor, the excluded and the exploited his interpretation of the cosmic reality attains a special significance. He is just not a disciple or ordinary follower of his Guru Mahima Swami but an interpreter of Mahima metaphysics. Composing lyrical poetry and singing them he addressed the common man to make him aware of the path to liberation both at the religious and social levels. His ability as a poet makes him unique- for he knew how to reform and resist at the social level using a metaphysical rhetoric.

Bhima Bhoi found Mahima principles compatible to his own poetic vision of a casteless and classless society. His devotional compositions are mostly about the glory of the founder of Mahima Dharma (Mahima Swami) and the Creator (Alekh Brahma). Moreover through these songs the Mahima postulates

were propagated. Mahima Dharma resulted out of a deep seated protest against the unequal social system prevalent in 19th century Odisha. Dr. Fanindam Deo observes: "The *Adivasi*-peasants and the lower *jatis* considered the orthodox Jagannath cult and *raja*-brahman nexus responsible for the loss of their traditional cultivable areas. This antagonism was hardened by the cultural differences between the *adivasi*-peasant and Brahman-ksatriya, which was accentuated by the latter's ideas of purity, pollution, dietary restriction and rigid class distinction. Coincidentally, in the great famine of Orissa in the 19th century, lakhs of people died. A section of people started thinking that it was due to the papa or sin committed by the ruling classes. Some saw the raja-Brahman combine and their associates as the cause of their miseries, and the Lord Jagannath as the protector of the former."(Deo.2015.64)

Bhima Bhoi who was a tribal and victim of the nexus found in his Master's doctrine an opportunity to ventilate his protest and realise his poetic dreams. He tried to propagate how the scope of *mukti* or liberation had been kept open in the doctrine for one and all irrespective of caste or creed.

Bhima Bhoi disseminated the Mahima principles not only through his bhajans, janana, chautisa but also through his long poems like *Stuti Chintamani*, *Nirveda Sadhana*, *Adi Antagita*, *Brahma Nirupana Gita*, *Shruti Nisedha Gita*.There are many other titles like *Mahima Mandala*, *Manusabha Mandala*,*Nabina Bihari Gita*, *Purna Samhita*, *Kaliyuga Gita* authored by him. It is said that in adolescence he fell into a well and refused all help waiting for God to come and save him. He was saved by Mahima Swami (Mukunda Das) who happened to be his guru. Controversies continue regarding his place of birth and the time when he turned blind. It is believed by many that he was born in a village called Jatasinga in Rairakhol in 1850 in a family that belonged to the Khond tribe. It is amazing to imagine the emergence of a poet from a background steeped in poverty and lack of education.

He was instructed by his guru to spread his teachings through poetry that made him return to Rairakhol from Joronda. His verses endeared him to the common people but he had to leave Rairakhol as the king did not approve of his activities. He moved

to Sonepur and ultimately stayed at Khaliapali. There too he was not totally free from threat and scorn.

His writings flow from his deep sense of devotion and intense human compassion. His spirituality never disconnected him from his roots, his experience of suffering. Through poetry he combines both. He admits in *Adi Anta Gita* that the inspiration to compose came from the grace he received from his master: "My ability to be a poet is but the grace of Shriguru/I am merely a boy without any knowledge or wit."

In *Brahma Nirupana Gita* Bhima Bhoi tries to describe the indescribable Brahma, the supreme lord, the sovereign of the universe. His view of 'Mahima' or the supreme significance posits an idea of the omniscient as formless. Here the poet struggles to counter the paradox of putting into words a reality which is outside language. Since he had to express the idea of Brahma as a pervasive cosmic void beyond imagination it was difficult to find appropriate imagery. To unravel the mystery of Brahma who does not have a shape is to witness the impossible. Once it is unravelled magic happens. Solid rocks melt into water; life enters into the corpse. Knowledge of *Brahma* makes rains coming from a sky without clouds, vision returns to the eyes of the blind, the wrinkled old body attains youth, and the frog kisses the cobra. In the poem he goes on busting all binaries in support of the significance of the epiphany, the moment of realisation of Brahma. The poet refers to Brahma as *Arupa* (beyond form), *Alekha* (beyond words), *Anama*(beyond naming) but at the same time imagines him as a cosmic being(*Purusha*). He goes on describing him that reminds one of *Purusha Sukta* of *RigVeda* where the cosmic being is described as both immanent in the manifested world and yet transcendent to it.

Instead of identifying the Purusha image with the all-pervading Vishnu the poet creates a being in terms of Mahima vocabulary using his poetic potential. He creates an altogether new mythology replacing the Hindu ones. Set against a conversational frame, through a sequence of questions and answers transacted between a disciple and the master the philosophy of Mahima unfolds in the long poem. But the cold philosophy of Mahima

becomes human when as a flow it is poured through Bhima's poetry. He proclaims that the ever eluding Brahma can be perceived by those who will receive His grace. It does not require any orthodox practice rather the path to witness Brahma is that of intuition and feelings. The 4th Chapter is full of verses combining antithetical ideas as attributes of Brahma. He is life and death, speech and silence, low and high, master and slave, actor and the act, poor and rich, and so on. Understanding of such riddling concept is not possible through study of Vedas and Vedanta, the poet says. Rather the true disciple has the possibility of Brahma-realisation. In Chapter 5 the 'Alekha Purusha' is described through a series of contradictions like "He has eyes yet he does not have eyes." In the same chapter the poet represents the seat of the supreme in terms of familiar images but rendering them by the prefix 'non'. For example "On the non-door is fixed a non- latch." There is a striking similarity in the Upanisadic version, "*Tad dure, tad antike.......*" (5th mantra of *Isa Upanisads*). The description of the temple in which the supreme dwells is mystified through cryptography. Number of steps in the stairways, measure of height, number of doors, and calculation of area of the mysterious temple seem to keep the secrets of Brahma encrypted. The hyperbolic claims of Mahima laid down by the poet not only renders the four Vedas irrelevant but dwarfs the Hindu gods like Brahma,Vishnu and Shiva depicting them as guards watching the gates.

Mahima has been like the logos for the followers of the sect. It is the womb wherefrom are born the four Vedas. The four religions too come from this source. According to the poet the four religions are Truth, Peace, Compassion and Forgiveness. He speaks of two races that constitute human beings: Man and Woman. He highlights the difference between men and women but interprets their relation not as oppositional but complimenting. Metaphorically they are like earth and rock, different manifestations of the same energy called Brahma. This kind of classification is a unique poetic approach. Since Bhima Bhoi was the codifier of Mahima religion (through the form of poetry) he constructs such ideas to promote this new religion. While chalking out the principles of Mahima he guards against dwelling on the metaphysical plane

but tries to humanise the ideas for public consumption. Again and again he relates the macrocosm with microcosm. He has sung the primacy of the body: "There is no consciousness of knowledge without the body."For him the physical is the base for invoking the metaphysical. The finite is a manifestation of the infinite. The transcendental Mahima is immanent at the same time.

Bhima Bhoi's poetic creativity renders the esoteric Mahima world-view accessible to the common people. His *Stuti Chintamani* is marked by a sense of pathos and empathy for the suffering humanity. There is a blending of the spiritual and the social in the text. To wrench people free from the miseries they are tied to the poet struggles and when he is confronted with a sense of pain and distress he utters these lines like a rebel:

Sitting along the bank I vow touching the waters of Mahanadi,
I'll violate dharma, get drunk and defile Brahmin women.
The miseries of living pierce my mind and my heart is wounded,
This helpless Bhima bows at His feet supplicating.
(26th Boli)

More or less self reproachful in tone the lines hint at the intensity of concern and an acute awareness of human fallibility that tear a poet's heart. In many such lines there is both a merger and friction between the mystic and the poet.

Professor Madhusudan Pati observes: "There have been few poets whose sorrow over human perversity and suffering has found so stirring and extensive articulation, whose militancy against social prejudice has been so uncompromising, and whose rebellion against an apparently cruel, unjust order has received such forceful expression." (Pati.1989.104)

In *Stuti Chintamani* the poet is more human and less obscure. Instead of proselytizing he speaks about the self, his own sense of failure and shaken state:

I followed the formless and died for nothing
My own surmise failed me.
(59th Boli)

In praise of *Stuti Chintamani* Dr.Pabitra Mohan Nayak says: "But Bhima Bhoi did not stop here – with proselytizing poetry. He fell in love with the Muse. And the proof is *Stuti Chintamani*. It is only when Bhima Bhoi's poetry ceases to be the vehicle of a cult, a creed, a religion, it is only when it refuses to be doctrinaire and didactic, it becomes poetry."(Nayak.2016.172).

In 27th section of *Stuti Chintamani* we get a glimpse of Bhima Bhoi's unique sense of empathy. His concern pervades the whole world. He feels for humans, trees, animals and all living beings. The poet's eco-consciousness binds him more with beings and things than his religious sense of all-encompassing Brahma. He asks whether it is possible to bear the brunt of endless suffering of mankind. His sensibility prompts him for self-sacrifice, self-inflicted pain if such act has any compensatory potential in ameliorating suffering. He confesses that he, who is made of "a piece of bone, a drop of blood and a pound of flesh", cannot stand the miseries of others. He is made of such stuff that is pained whenever another's body is kicked. Oscillating between trust and tumult the poet presents his unique line which is often quoted by critics and referred to by readers:

"Let my life rot in hell,
let the world be redeemed."

(27th Boli)

This memorable line is the key to comprehend the poet's intense concern for others. Critics tend to relate it with John Donne's line "Any man's death diminishes me". In this context Dostoevsky's lines come to mind: "There is only one way to salvation, and that is to make yourself responsible for all men's sins. As soon as you make yourself responsible in all sincerity for everything and for everyone, you will see at once that this is really so, and that you are in fact to blame for everyone and for all things."(Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov)

S.C. Panigrahi in his work on Bhima Bhoi has rightly commented: "The first exponent of Mahima Dharma is the celebrated poet-metaphysician Bhima Bhoi. He is a poet of eminence, a humanist of high order, an abstruse metaphysician subscribing

significantly to the Advaita view of Vedānta on the one hand and to the Mādhyamika Sunyavāda on the other."(Panigrahi.1998.10). But apart from his Mahimite mission he will be remembered for his poetic vision, his contribution as a poet to Odia literature.

A poet is a monk of a different kind. Bhima Bhoi is a saint-poet no doubt but he is more a poet than a saint. That is the reason why he wanted people not to be blind followers but to discern for themselves the significance of Mahima:

What is in chanting if you don't hear?
What is in hearing if you don't read?
What is in reading if you don't understand?
What is in understanding if you don't discern.

(Chapter 14,
Brahma Nirupana Gita)

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Mahima Dharma :
Vedic Dharma Redefined from Within

Ganesh Prasad Das

Mahima 'dharma' dawned in Odisha in the early 19th century when the state was under the capture of the British. This is not a very old religion. But its proponents claim that this is older than the oldest faiths, owing its origin to the *Vedas* and the *Upanisads,* which are seldom studied properly these days. According to Dr. Harekrushna Mahtab, Mahima Swami appeared in Odisha in 1826 A.D., travelled in different parts of the state and stayed at Kapilas for some time and then disappeared. The copiously recorded version of Mahima dharma is due to Bisvanatha Baba. His treatise *Alekha Param Brahma Darsanam*[1] in two volumes is first published by Prachi Samiti in 1931 and then by Utkal University in 1968. The Purvārdha (former half) volume has a preface written by Professor Ratnakar Pati and the Uttarārdha (later half) volume has a preface written by Professor Ganeswar Mishra, a student and successor of Professor Pati – two celebrated philosophers of Odisha.

The philosophy propounded in *Alekha Param Brahma Darsanam* is distinctively known as *Visuddhādvaita Brahmavāda. Brahmavāda* as propounded by the *Vedas* and the *Upaniṣads* is interpreted and presented in different versions by different *acaryas* with the most important of *Suddhadvaita of* Vallabha being most important among them. *Visuddhadvaitavada* seeks to find fault with these interpretations and captures the common core of their views, which is originally enshrined in the primeval source of the *Vedas* and *the Upaniṣads.* Saṁkara is right when he says that the ultimate reality is *nirakāra* (shapeless), and *nirvisesa* (attributeless) *Brahman.* What is not so much right with him is that the world of names and forms is created out of *māyā.* Saṁkara's view is dubbed as *Nirvisesadvaitavāda* as *Brahman* does not have any differentiation in terms of *sajātiya* (homegenous), *vijātiya* (heterogeneous) and *svagata* (indigenous) categories. *Māyāvāda* of Saṁkara is an unwarranted doctorine

according to Mahima Swami Ramanuja does not admit *sajatiya* (homogenous) and *vijatiya* (heterogeneous) differentiations of *Brahman*, but admits of the *svagata* (indigenous) differentiations. Although the world (*Jagat*) is different from Brahman, it is not an appearance and is as real as *Brahman*. This is not acceptable to Mahima Swami. According to the latter, Brahman is devoid of all differentiations. Brahman is *visuddha* (pure to the highest degree), *nirguṇa* (attributeless) and non-dual. The interpretation of the coming to be of the world is distinctive in *Visuddhādvaita darsana*. It is a creation by the *mahimā* of Brahman. This interpretation is different from the interpretations offered by the *āchāryas*. It is not, for that 1 matter, a novel one. As already indicated, it is very much there in the primeval source, that is the *Vedas* and the *Upaniṣads*. The *Chhandogya Upaniṣad* states that *Brahman* is established by its own *mahimā*: "*sve mahimne pratisthitaḥ*," the term '*mahimā*' *bears* both the kinds of attributes *svarupa* as well as *tatastha*, a distinction prevalent in the *Advaita* literature. The *tatastha* attributes are, *sarvakarma, sarvakāma, sarvagandha, sarvarasa, sarvadhyaksa, sarvaguṇadhara* and the *svarupa* attributes are, having no beginning and no end, beyond *sat* and *asat*, devoid of duality and non-duality, shorn off all categories, *nirguna, niskriya, nirlipta, sānta and Satchidananda.*

The Vedāntins speak of creation out of *māyā*, the Vaisnavites talk of creation as *lila* and the Mahimites talk of creation out of and as mahima. *Māyā* and *lilā* do not convey the right view of creation. The former signifies illusion and evanescence and the latter gives the impression of sport and playfulness. *Mahimā* avoids such disregarding and whimsical impressions and satisfies the logical, scientific as well as the religious urges of the human being.

Satya Mahimā Dharma is the bright path which the *ārya* rsis took thousands of years ago being indoctrinated under the direction of the accredited scriptures for worship of a unitary Lord in order to attain liberation. Sukadev views Mahimā dharma as *Vaidika Satya Sanātana Dharma*. By the term '*Vaidika Satya Sanātana*' he means the totality of principles which are the ultimate findings of the *Vedas*, are self-evidently and eternally true, and are applicable to all without any prejudice.

Stuti, prārthanā, upāsanā, japa and *dhyāna* are necessary features of *Mahimā* dharma. They are said and paid to the *paramatman*, the *creator*, *sustainer* and destroyer of the universe. *Paramatman* is intelligence, shapeless and non-qualified and inexpressible. The seeker need not depend on anything other than *paramātman*, who is everybody's preceptor, father, mother, deity, friend, associate, doer and destroyer. He needs only to reset his mind, denuded it of all pre-conceptions and set ideas.

This is a dark phase of time. Injustice rules the roost. Vice is pervasive. It is due to Brahmanas fiddling with the Vedas.

Rāga ahaṁkāra hṛdare sahi napāre dande/
Rāvana parāya heleni pṛthvi bhārata khande//
Lobhe mohe citaku tara bhāngileni dharmaku/
Lobha bānijyare mātile chhādi nija dharmaku//
Bāi prāya hoi bhramanti bidhimata na jāṇi/
Visa praya phingi deleṇi vedasiddhanka vāṇi
(Cautisa,4)

Brahmanyadharma is regarded as a massively infamous social phenomenon mainly because it divides the society on caste lines and causes deprivation to many in the society. I would like to submit that there is nothing like Brahmanyadharma. It is an uncritical acceptance of a stance of the West on Indian society and culture expressed by a term of their coinage 'Brahminical religion.' 'Religion' has a sense in the West, which is different from the sense that 'dharma' has. It is important to remember that it is the Vedic dharma, which had been the way of life of people living in the Indus valley from time immemorial. Here 'religion' is taken in the secular sense. This statement might sound self-stultifying or even self-contradictory. But it is not. The word 'religion' is taken in a very broad and comprehensive sense – the sense in which we talk of the Vedic religion. God ok, no god ok; temple ok, no temple ok; worship, no worship ok; wearing marks ok, not wearing marks ok. Only be happy, stay happy and make others happy; help all, harm none; live and let others live; do your work and treat it as the work of the Lord (I do not say 'God') of the universe getting performed through the resources endowed upon your and that is all. The central conception of this

dharma is Brahman, which constitutes the point of convergence of ontological, epistemological and axiological discourses as Brahman, things and beings in space and time-consciousness as such and bliss as such. The particular thing in space and time having varied shapes and names and names point to the existence of Brahman, which is not in space and time and hence is not a locatable thing having shape and name. Brahman is nameless (*anāma*),shapeless (*arūpa*). This is known in the reflective state, not in sensuous experience. Ordinary people get stuck with things and beings in sensuous experience, but the extra-ordinary ones rise above it. Such people are of two types according to Bhima Bhoi, the direct disciple and the leading proponent of Mahima dharma: (i) *siddha, sādhu* and *santha*, and (ii) *Jñāni* (wise). The wise one meditate in abstraction and think without shapes and names. Siddhas, sadhus and santhas are situated at a level below the wise. They are at the level of mind. They cannot think in pure abstraction. They need something concrete which is an archetype of particular ones having shape and name. Shape is constructed as per epithets and descriptions attributed to the Lord or his incarnations and a suitable name is given like Mukunda, Mādhava or Hari. Idol-worship begins, offerings are made and boons are prayed for. Business-like transactions in the mode of give and take between the Lord and the 'devotee' goes on. There is no *avatārvāda* in Mahimā dharma. The reason is that Śūnya cannot assume embodied form like Mukunda, Mādhava or Hari. This constitutes the distinctiveness of Mahima dharma.

It might have begun in pure feelings and good intentions and the entire process of devotion and worship might have some salutary effect on the society. But, on the whole, there is more of evil than good accruing from the institutionalised and patent-protected rituals, so to say. Some scholars like S. Radhakrishnan provide an explicit justification for the twin mode of meditation: (i) meditation on and worship of Brahman as *ṇirguna, nirākāra, ṇirvisesa, ṇiranjana, anādi, ananta, anāma, arūpa, etc.*, and (ii) meditation on and worship of Brahman as *saguṇa* having shape and name, creator, sustainer and destroyer of the universe, dispenser of justice, supreme authority to grant grace, saviour from perils and needs of life. The best of the best in everything

is epitomised in the idol that they worship and say prayers to. Radhakrishnan says that the latter caters to the need of people with lower degree of intelligence, whereas the former caters to the need of people with higher degree of intelligence. This view creates more problems than it solves as it does not appreciate properly the role of rituals in the life of man.

It has been said that the task of the philosopher is to think with the wise and talk with the vulgar. Bhima Bhoi seeks to appeal to the 'vulgar'- the co-called people with lower degree of intelligence. He explodes the absurdity and lop-sided idea of idol worship. The following lines of *Stuti Chintāmani* are very important samples of his iconoclastic view that I have redefined *Vedic dharma* from within'. His contention is that idol worship is display of sheer ignorance, justifies his contention and spells out the right ways of doing things.

Aāṇtare sinā janaprāni mane karuchanti deva pujā/
Pāde padi rakṣākara boluchanti debu kṣiri puri khajā//

Murti sina sehi, jiva ātmā nāhin, kāhun jāchi deva bara/
Visnu nata kuta, māyāre na jāni, ajnanare mudha nara//

Jehu gadhichi āpaṇā pinda prāna tānku samarpaṇa nāhin/
Dāru pratimā murtiki boluchanti prānaku banchā a tuhi//

Manusya hoinirijiva sange bhāva dekhati kede ajñāna/
Śūnyaru jehu pinda prāna gadhilā nāhin tānku anumāna//

Durlabha janama, biartha heuchi paramesvara na chinhi/
Ajnanare nare savuunku pujile prakrtire sukha maṇi//

apaṇā manare jahā vicārile, sehi karmamāna kale/
satha karmakānde, samaste padile, nija dharma na jāṇile//

sādhu janamāne, aviveka nuhan nija karma anusara/
tadagata kari, namaare kale, dustare hoiva para//

jagati attali medhe mandapare labhibun boli mukati/
dāru pratimā, sthāpanā murti jete e nuhain sadagati//
(Bhima Bhoi, Stuticintamani,96)[2]

*(Cf. Jagata bhagata jana āsa lodibā prabhunku/
se prabhu kāhin rahile tejina tini dārunku//
(Stutichintamani,70)*

Brāhmanyavāda is a very pernicious upshot of *Brahmavāda*. By saying 'upshot', I do not mean to say that the former is the necessary outcome of the latter. One could admit the latter and yet reject the former. *Mahimā* dharma seeks to disengage *Brāhmanyavāda* from *Brahmavāda*. Whether the devotees of *Mahimā* dharma at some point of history flexed their muscles to show this or not is not very much important for the present discussion. More often than not, history gets mixed up with myth sneakily and gradually becomes indistinguishable from one another in course of time. What is important here is the conceptual viability of *Brahmavāda* as the sure base for peaceful life without tension. Mahima Swami affirms this strongly.

Now, the question is, if Brāhmanas know Brahman, they must have become Brahman as *"Brahmavit Brahmaiva Bhavati."* Why are they then overtaken by *lobha* (cupidity), *moha* (infatuation) and *krodha* (infuriation)? Bhima Bhoi urges upon the Brāhmanas to come to track of *Satya. Brahmajnana* as enunciated in the *Vedas*:

*Brāhmaṇamane vedakrame
Ebe ho cāla satya dharme
Brahma pralaya ghunci jiva
Vasudhā usvāsa hoiva
brahmajnanaku kari laye
Bhima arkṣita phedi kahe
(Astaka Bihari Gita, Chapter 4)*[3]

The Veda is a vast body of knowledge, especially concerning *Isvara. (Jnanabanta hoichi Vedare*-Bhima Bhoi*) The* Veda *gives rise to ṇirveda. (Stuti,28) One attains Brahma or Śūnya (*that is *brahmatva* or *Śūnyatva*; neither Brahma nor *Śūnya* being any entity to be got or space to be at*) by jnana*, nay, *in and through jnana,* that is, by acquiring *jñāna*, meditating on its object, its subject, its method and the interrelationship between the three, know about the scope and limit of *jnana* and then transcend *jñāna*. In this sense, the expressions from the Veda to *ṇirveda*,

'apanā heture cetāi parile' and *átmāku atmāre dekha'* are to be understood. (Cf., *'trigunyavisaya Veda nistraigunyah bhavarjuna'*, *The Bhagbat Gita*, II-45 and *'evam buddhau para budhya..., The Bhagbat Gita*, III-43) people are unnecessarily indulging in mystical speculations *("anartha gopyare sarve yauchanti vahi").* The *Rig Veda* postulates that *hiranyagarva* is what was at the beginning from which everything came out. It is not something, it is not nothing; it is only layers on layers of darkness impenetrable. The *Śūnya* that Mahimaites speak about is not exactly a simple void. It is void replete with all possibilities. It is potentially a glorious plenum. Madhvacarya is of the view that the Buddhist's conception of *Śūnya* is not different from the Advaita Vedantin's conception of Brahma: *"Yat Śūnyavadinah Śūnyam tat eva brahma mainah"*.

Brahmabhakti discourse is utterly baseless. It can be said to be useless, but not nonsense. If one accords to *Brahman* or Śū*nya* the status of an entity, then the talk about the same becomes useless or even nonsense. [What is nonsense is useless, the opposite is not necessarily so.] *Brahmabhakti* lacks one single locus. It is not that it has no locus. The locus of *Brahmabhakti* is the seeker whole and sole. The man who seeks to know *Brahman*, and who when comes to know *Brahman* becomes *Brahman*, seeks to lead a life of peace without tension by himself/within his family with the rest of the world around in mutual cohesion. He is a simple and single component structure. He is a body, a mind, an intellect and something beyond. He is not the body alone, not the mind alone, not the intellect alone, not a something beyond barring body, mind and intellect. If a man regards himself/ is regarded by others to be a body alone, he is not different form a pick-able, kick-able thing. If he is mind alone in the sense that mind is supervenient over body, emotions and sentiments become drivers of his action. Every man would thus live in a state of nature, where everybody is on to himself and himself alone. It is intellect alone, in the sense that intellect is valuable higher than body and mind, then there is predominance of a particular class of people who create and propagate knowledge. Such a class of people, known as *Brahmana* appropriated to itself exclusive proprietary rights over discussion about Brahman. *"Brahma janati iti Brahmana."*

If man is regarded as none of the above three in isolation or in combination, but of something beyond it is likely to be pernicious. All the physical, mental and intellectual resources, activities and processes related with these would be regarded as being of no avail and consequently, the life that man leads ordinarily would be topsy-turvy. Perfunctory work-ethics rather than perfect work ethics would guide man. Saṁkara characterises the world as *māyā*, *Brahman* alone being real in the unwavering sense of the term. This single most idea brings to Samkara distinction, but earns him abundant censure. Rāmānujācarya onwards and in the contemporary time Sri Aurobindo come heavily on Samkara for this. But Samkara is a critical philosopher and seeks to keep every concept in place. He is not a prey to confusion; his task to save all those who are overtaken by confusion and act in puzzlement. However, *Srimad Bhagavad Gita,* which Samkara comments on, proclaims that the performance of work assigned to one in a perfect manner is yoga; *"yogah karmasu kausalam."*

The story of creation as brought out Mahimā dharma is short. *Anādi mandala* is the source: *"anādi mandalaru sarve sancaṛi"*. *Isvara, jiva and prakṛti* originate from *anadi mandala.* It is interesting to note that *Isvara* is *sat, chit, and ananda*, *jiva* is *sat* and *cit. Prakṛti* is *sat* only. This is known as *srsti traitavada.* Sukadev contends that Saṁkara is committed to *(upāsaka)* of this *traitavada.* ('*Upāsanā*' is holdig fast to and concentrate upon a given idea or principle.) But Saṁkara's *upāsanā* of *nirguna* nad *nirākāra Brahman* is not an acceptable idea. He does not perceive any difference between *jiva* and *Brahman.* If people accept this view, then nobody would say/do *stuti*, *prārthana* and *upāsanā* of *paramātman.* (News came recently that a man installed his own icon in a temple and began to worship it saying that he is *paramātman.*) This is a absurd position brought out by the idea of non-difference between *jivātman* or *paramātman* (or by a confusion that the man has fallen into?) The idea of *jiva Brahma* duality is self-evident; it is "accepted by the human kind," *Jiva* is *alpajna* (having limited knowledge) and Brahman is *sarvajña* (knowing everything or omniscient) and as such they can never be non-different. One cannot explain away something which is entrenched in people's form of life', if I can borrow the expression

from Wittgenstein. The absence of distinction between *upāsya* (worshipped) and *upāsaka* (worshipper) is ludicrous.

To save people who are nose-deep in confusion and mystical speculation, Mahima dharma enunciates what should one's mode of thinking, feeling and willing should be, so that life of peace and happiness would prevail. The whole gamut of power of physical organs, mind, intellect and the power that they could possibly attain (infinite possibilities lie open ahead) constitute the locus of cardinal moral virtues like *sānti* (peace), *dayā* (kindness), *kṣamṣā* (forgiveness),*sahanasilatā* (tolerance), *srama* (toil), *amrtadṛsti* (magnanimous attitude) and *sevā* (service). The role models are things and processes of Nature: the earth, the air, the fire, the Sun and the Moon. We learn from the *Bhagavata Purāna* that Uddhava identified twenty-four, four or two hundred four as one could accommodate in one's framework. It is nine according to *Sāmaveda*.

Some scholars are of the view that Mahimā dharma proceeds from morality to Divinity, not from Divinity to morality. We know already that Mahimā dharma was out to cleanse the rubbishes accured to *Vaidika dharma*. According to this view, morality in *Vaidika dharma* comes as commandments from some authority in the form of person, text or revelation, then this is not at all correct. Again, on the other hand, if this means that Mahima dharma seeks to justify the existence of a Divine being as a moral Being (with capital 'B') on the basis of moral practices of human beings, then this leads to unintelligible metaphysical speculation as the conceptual framework of Mahimā dharma does not need the concept of such a Being.

Bhakti is there. But it is devoid of prayer, grace, boon and fortune. It is termed as *niskamabhakti*. This is utter commitment to and espousal of *satya* and *dharma*. These two are derived from *anama* and are central to the whole conception of any possible universe *(bhuvana)*. The distinction between *pāpa* (vice) and *punya* (virtue), *bhala* (good) and *manda* (evil) are all subsumed by *satya* and *dharma*. *Satya* and *dharma* are not actually two; they are two sides of the same coin, or like two names, '*Pārtha*' and '*Gudākesa*' denoting the self-same warrior

of the Mahabharata war. Every thought and every act of man needs to be soaked with *satya.*

Satya dharma dhara satya karma kara satye kare guru seva
....
Satyare snahana satyare marjana, satyare kara bhojana
....
Satyare soiva satyare basiva satye kara phalavṛtti
Mahimā bhajiva lokamāne jete kara ehi dharma kirtti
(Stuti cintamani, 82)

Dr. Sadasiva Mishra, in his preface to the *Purvārdha* volume writes that life is overwhelmed by *bhaktiyoga* and expanded in *jñānayoga*; love comes out of *bhakti* and enlightenment comes out of jnana. Dr. Mishra's view is that Visvanatha Baba traverses through *jñānayoga*, whereas Bhima Bhoi traverses through *bhaktiyoga*. This view does not appear to be justified. Bhima Bhoi lays utmost emphasis on *jñāna*. He talks about *bhakti*, but this is not *bhakti* in the ordinary sense of the term. *Bhakti*, according to Bhima, is a product of mature *jñāna* and this is the view of *the Bhagavad Gita* as well.

Pandit Nilakantha Das is of the view that the depiction made in the Gita is Vedic dharma. He also calls it as *yukti dharma* – a dharma that stands to reason – and also as *mānava dharma* – a dharma that is pro-human resources development (human beings are not resources, but the resources that the human beings are endowed with). Much is said about Bhima Bhoi's verse,

Prāninka ārata duhkha apramita dekhu dekhu keva sahu
Mo jivana pachhe narke padithāu jagata uddhāra hau

It is said that this verse has been inscribed on the wall of UNO building. I want to point out that the concern for man, elimination of his miseries of every type (*tritāpa* afflictions: '*ādhyatmika*' i.e., those that are due to one's self; the '*ādhidaivika*' those that arise out of deities or are of supernatural origin, and the '*ādhibhautika*' those that arise out of natural causes and beings) and his elevation to Divinity is an inherent feature of *Vaidika dharma*. If some followers at some time have neglected this, then they are vile. But then those who have tried to refurbish the prespective of human

concern are denounced as vile, heretics. This for resons other than the human feeling and concern, which is present in the blood and sinews of every arya. Buddhism and Mahima-ism are attempts of such redefinition. C.D Sharma quotes a statement of the Buddha, which says "Let all the sins and miseries of the world fall upon my shoulders, so that all the beings may be liberated from them." (*"kalikalusakrtani yani loke mayi tani patantu vimucatam hi lokah"*) we are reminded of Utkalamani's concern:

Svādhinatā pathe achi jete gada
Puru tahin padi mora māṁsa hāda

If we try to understand what Bhima Bhoi is concerned with, it would be hard, but revealing. Buddha was concerned with the lofty goal of liberation and Utkalmani with the immediate goal of freedom. What was Bhima concerned with? *Uddhāra of Jagat.* This reflects solely of this suffering from an inferiority complex due to the neglect of a section and hegemony of another section in the society. All the three concerns are three aspects of one and the same concern – the human concern and all the three are live and vibrant in our society today. The present day society is miles away from the lofty goal charted by the Buddha, the noble goal indicated by Utkalmani and the remorseful goal poetically sobbed out by Bhima Bhoi.

He is not against any *jāti;* he is all out for the preservation and thorough performance of *jātidharma* without deviation or defilement.

Kāhāra jāti kehi je na rakhile budilā veda acāra
Tini brahmāndare jete dehadhari sarve hele ekākāra

Sukadeva Parivrajakacārya (roving teacher) quotes a line from *Hathayogapradipika* with approval, "*kriyaiva karana siddheh*" (*Tattvadrasta Bhima Bhoi O Vaidika Darsana*, P.87)[4] and means to say that possession/attribution of the above mentioned moral virtues is functional. *Hathayogapradipika* might mean it otherwise; perhaps it understands the term '*kriyā*' in a technical sense different from 'function.'

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Bhima Bhoi : Poet of the People [1]

Prof. Pabitra Mohan Nayak

Sam Gachhatwam, Sam Badadhawam, Sambo Maṇānsi Jāṇatam

Walk together, speak together (in one voice). Think together. This was the voice of the Vedas, of saints and sages of your standing neck-deep waters of the holy Ganga Thousands of years ago. And thousands of years after we here the same voice of togetherness, oneness, unity and universal brotherhood ringing from page to page in the poetry of Bhima Bhoi, from *Brahma Sanjukta Gitā* to *Brahma Nirupaṇa Gitā*, *Srutinisedha Gitā* to *Astaka Bihari Gitā*, *Chautisā Madhuchakra* to *Stuti Chintamani*, *Nirveda Sādhanā* to *Bhajanamālā*, *Manusabhāmandala* to *Mahimā Vinod*, The voice writ large in the Ashoka Hall of the Indian Parliament , the voice reverberation loud and clear in the glass-and-steel structure of the United Nations building.

Who can bear to see the immeasurable suffering of mankind?/
Hurl me into hell, Lord, but save the world

One step farther than the *Upaniṣadic* benediction: *Sarve bhavantu sūkhinah.* When the National Academy of Letters asked for a couple from each of the fourteen languages, symbolic of its total ethos, the litterateurs of Orissa chose the last line, thus endowing on an unlettered, humble *kandha* a unique national honour, writes poet Mansing.

Born in the dust heap of the garjet jungles, Bhima Bhoi hitched his wagon to the stars. From the palmgrove of Jatasingha to the metropolitan city of Newyork, he has taken a giant leap. It may not be out of place to mention here that Friends has brought out under my editorship *Bhima Bhoi Granthavali* in two vols, containing lots of unpublished materials which may prove imnersaly useful to readers and researchers one word on your Advisor, Prof. H.K. Satapathy under whose dynamic stewardship six vols. of the critically edited *Rāmāyana* which have walked

1 An extended version of a talk delivered at Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences, Bhubaneswar on 18th Feb. 2021.]

into more that twenty world libraries were published by Tirupati Sanskrit University, an epic Bhima Bhoi has reduced to nine stanzas in one of his songs. Seven volumes in nine stanzas.

The history of humanity is the history of the Marxist conflict between the bourgeoise and the proletariats, human rights and inhuman might, those who swim in wealth, and those who sink in their own tears, between whites and blacks, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the White House.

The slave exhausted with over work in *The Slave's Dream'* under the burning sun of the Africa summer sky drops off to sleep and to dream of a joy ride with his queen singing and laughing when the whips of his white master crack on his bare back, one by one, until the hapless slave wakes into death.

This was more /less the fact of the low-born in 19th century India. It was a society divided against itself, caste against caste, man against man. A world of society unequality, economic disparity, political injustice. A world of gender distinction and religious discrimination. A world of general distinction and religious discrimination a world of illiteracy and intolerance, ignominy and ignorance, bethi and begari, hunger and squalor, disease, decay and death. A handful enjoyed powers, positions, privileges for little merit of theirs and a majority stood deprived for no fault of their own. They stayed contented with their superstitious practices and blind beliefs in ghosts and spirits, *yantra, mantra* and *tantra.* There were hospitals and schools, but not for them, not for their children, either. They were outcaste, untouchables who lived on the margin of life. They tilled the fields, but were not allowed to share the harvest. They built temples, but were not permitted to enter them and offer their worship, if you don't read the ṣā*stras* and *purāṇas,* observe *bratas* and *upabāsas*, under lack *tirthayātras*, you can't access Mokṣa. They could not do all this because they were not allowed to, so the road to salvation them this life and since they have earned no punya here, There is no hope for them in the life to come. Thus they moved irrevocable from darkness to damnation. Pravabdha ruled their life accept what came their way. They raised no voice against brahminical orthodoxy, no finger of protest against the Rajas unmitigated autocratic tyranny.

"In the eyes of the beggar I have seen the earthquake and the simoom. Sitting in the crowded restaurants I've over heard the confabulations of weasels".

Give us something to live for. We have waited too long. Like in Auden's *The Ascent of F6*, here too there were tremors of an earthquake but they could not shake the throne of kings. Against Auden's impatience, here were the uncomplain undemanding poor with infinite patience with never-ender capacity for endurance and stories resignation to an inhospitable fact.

This brings us to the next question, the question of feminism Bhima Bhoi was a die-hard feminist. If God is one, should there be class discrimination, gender distinction? If you talk of equality, why keep women under chains? Are they not humans? Have they no human rights? Why should they be discriminated? Long before Gandhi lunched the movement for removal of untouchability, for freedom for women, here was a poet who championed the cause of eradication of untouchability and emancipation of women. Think of the atrocities on women in *The Barrets of Wipole Street* by Elizabeth Barret Browning of 19th Century England. Bhima Bhoi lived in the Victorian Age with its Victorian values its women voiceless and veiled. Paralyzed tongues. They were Asuryampasyah. Remember Monisha's encaged existence in Anita Desai's *Voices in the City*, Virginia Woolf called them angles in the house Bhima Bhoi shattered their, shackles, broke down their chains. He liberated them. He was the most alongest .... women's lib' before this concept struck roots in modern India. Yet mere emancipation was not enough. They must be empowered. In *Adi Anta Gita*, he made them equal partners with men. He admitted them to Khaliapali āshram against the injuctions of his Guru. He gave them a place alongside men. He gave them positions of power. He not only married a Brāhmin women, Annapurna, sister of Bhima Das of Joranda and that too in a Brāhminical like Sonepur, he made her *Adimātā* or *Adi Annapurnā* of Khalliapali ashram which brought about a harmony between life spiritual and life temporal '*yoga*' and '*bhoga*' as he observes in Stuti Chintamani. On ceremonial occasions they were taken round the village and offerings were

made every door. This was not the end of Bhima Bhoi's long journey towards feminism. He was one of the most dynamic, daring prophets of the century who advocated and adopted inter-caste marriage and widow remarriage prohibited by the great Tradition.

If Bhima Bhoi believed in no castes or classes, he was a monist, a non-dualist, an Adwaitavādin to whom God is not many but one. Like to Shelley in *Adonais:*

The one remains, many change and pass
Life like a dome of many-coloured glass
Stains the white radiance of Eternity.

Or, to Wordsworth in *'Tintern Abbey'* He is one,

Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns
And the round ocean and the living air;
And the blue sky and in the mind of man

But this Adwaitabad is different from Sankara's for here is no place for *Maya* or illusion. Bhima Bhoi in the strictest sense was not a *Sunyabādin*, in the sense Nagarjuna was. Nagarjuna, God is *Sunya, Sunya, Mahasunya*. He was a nihilist but Bhima Bhoi was not, His Void is not altogether a void. He is something behind nothing someone, the another pomorphic from the divine. Which appealed to the majority of minds for they cannot believe what they do not see. And for this, Bhima Bhoi ...to weave a myth they round Mahima, a halo round his head. Bhima Bhoi's God is Śū*nya Brahma, Ayonisambhuta*. He is formless, nameless, colourless, sexless, bodiless. He has neither appearance nor attributes. He is *Anāma, Abanā, Abarnā, Apāda, Apāni, Anākāra, Abyaya, Abyakta, Akṣaya, Amurta, Asruta, Ajyoti, Adṛusya and Alekha*. He is *Nirākāra, Nirguṇa, Nirabayaba, Niranjana, Niṣkama Brahma, Akalana Bārānidhi*, unfathomable sea, Primum Mobile at whose behest the sun sets, the moon rises and stars and planets move in their pre-ordained course.

This *Śūnya Brahma* walks without feet, tastes without tongue, laughs without lips, helps without hands, saves without pity, chews iron falls without teeth. He cooks without fire, eats without

utensils, buys without paying, runs the family without spending. In *The Saga of the Land of Jagannath*, Mansing wonders how this illiterate kandha born into an animistic society could rise into the pure, this air of Vedāntic abstractions and Buddhistic self-culture. Like the bards of the Upaniṣad, he saw a path of light across the field of empty darkness. He heard the unstruck chord of the unnamed land.

Like Blake, with his '*Chariot of fire*' and '*bow of burning gold*', Bhima Bhoi was a mystic and a visionary who visualized the '*light that never was on sea or land*. His lurid picture of *kaliyuga* in *Astaka Bihari Gitā, Bhajana Mālā* and *Chautisā Madhuchakra*, etc. which rather comes close to Arnold's 'Dover Beach' where this darkling plain holds neither peace nor certitude nor help for pain or to Eliot's the *Waste Land* where the passion of man is burning, burning, burning. Eliot's vision of peace that passes understanding at the close of this poem is rather a silver line on the dark could overhanging this dry land, this parched land, this waste land. Hadi Das in *Mālikā* plays a prophet of doom but Bhima sees the green vision of spring after the long cold winter of nightmarish *Kaliyuga*. He depicts in vivid detail the dazzling vision of *Satyayuga* dawning upon mankind at the end of the dark night. The long procession of Mahimā Swāmi shining in full glory followed by Mahimaites, the endless rows of lamps lighted and umbrellas unfolded. The beating of hundreds of drums and the dancing of innumerable *apsarās*, his intimations of a larger implicit order remind us of Tennyson in *Locksley Hall*.

"For I dipped into the future, for as human eye could see
Saw the vision the world and all the wonder that would be
Where the war-drums throb'd no linger and the battleflags were furled.
In the Parliament of men, the Federation of the world."

We remember Bhima Bhoi for all this, his doctrines of socialism, feminism, monism, pacifism, radical social reformism and on the top of all his *humanism*. Bhima had a kind, compassionate heart who rose from personal insults and injuries to a felling for entire mankind. He was a humanist who suffered with those he saw suffer. It is indeed strange that he who received no sympathy, no kindness from people around had so much blood to spare for the

bleeding humanity, so much love for those who hated him, love so much pity for those who beat him, spat on his face, torched his hut on the hill and pushed him down an abandoned well in a bid to kill him. He wished them well though they made his brief life hell with bitter suffering and burning pain:

"O my Lord, for preaching your glory, they taunt me a Christian. Drive him away, they shout, let's see which father protects him and when I preach equality, they call me a dog and pelt me with stones. This is my fate, Lord wherever I go. The very next moment when he sees the Great Flood out to engulf the world; he cries, come along, come along, Lord! All the twenty one worlds are sinking. The earth is falling down, falling down, falling down. Where is your boat? Sea of Mercy, if you do not hold your earth, who will? Not mankind alone but birds and animals, plants and planets must be saved." (*Stuti Chintāmaṇi*)

His poetry rings with hope and fear, passion and pathos, anger and agony, confrontation and conciliation, forgiveness and submissiveness, aspiration and frustration of generation. Brought up in a neglected adivasi family, Bhima Bhoi had this cosmic consciousness, this all encompassing global vision.

Last but not least Bhima's use of language. He was a man, a simple, ordinary man with an extraordinary mind and an extraordinary heart, living with plain ordinary people and writing for them in a language unadorned and unostentatious. His poetry had no artistry of a kavisamrat, no chiseled expression of a Kavibara, no cadences of a Kavisurya but it combined the natural beauty and spontaneity of Sarala Das and the bare, lyric lucidity of a Jagannatha Das. His Odia was interlaced with words local and colloquial, rustic and coarse. It not only appealed to the common men with whom he lived and for whom he fought and wrote. It enriched Odia vocabulary. As Wordsworth would have it, he was '*a man speaking to men*' he used homely images and common idioms of day to day life and this at a time when Sanskrit and Sanskritic Kavyas were composed by pundits, discussed in royal durbars and published with royal patronage, some even in the names of the patrons. On the other hand, Bhima stridently, almost defiantly declared: *Rajāra parajā nohu āmbhe, nohu sāhura*

khātaka. I'm no subject to a king, no debtor to a money-lender. Unlike the protagonists of Radhanath who were puranic or mythic, his heroes are common men trudging along the rough roads of the countryside or working in knee-deep mud in the cornfields. Even his *magnum opus, Stuti Chintāmaṇi* use the first person singular, the poet as the hero in contravention to all conventions. Therefore, those who claim that Bhima Bhoi was the pioneer, the pace-setter, the path-finder of modern Odia poetry commit no error nor exaggeration. Bhima Bhoi belongs to the ages.

Philosophy of Bhima Bhoi and Kabir

Sarat Chandra Panigrahi

The purpose of writing this paper is to present a comparative evaluation of philosophy of two great saints Bhima Bhoi and Kabir. If the philosophical acumen of Kabir and Bhima Bhoi is not discussed properly, it will be a great injustice to adjudge them as mere poets. Their poetic genius is a message for all to overcome the evils of society and to establish an ideal harmonious society. It is just because of our dogmatic attachment to Brāhminical traditions, most of the people ignored contribution of Bhima Bhoi and Kabir for establishment of a kind of spiritual humanism. Both have similar religious, philosophical, moral and social views. In their philosophico-poetic expressions one can find a rare and real insight into a superb vision and world-view. They emerge as a towering torch-bearers and epoch-making eye-opener with solemn dedications to the service of man turning man to divine, re-accentuating in lofty terms the age old human values with extraordinary sagacity which revibrates the commoners. These saints are not the system-builders in the philosophical sense. Their purpose was not to present a theory to be preached but to be practised. From their writings one can know their metaphysical, social and religious system. The writings do provide the necessary illumination and nourishment to the aspiring souls while removing the prevalent misconceptions about man, God and the universe. But every social paradigm or religious system does provide a metaphysics or a world-view. Their writing were meant for common man as every man has a divine spark and natural urge for attaining godhood or perfection. Although they were aware of the richness of Sanskrit language, but it was limited to the privileged class and common man could not access or understand the language. Both Kabir and Bhima Bhoi used the vernacular language that can be understood by the common man so that they can easily know the spiritual practices.

Kabir says that Sanskrit is like stagnant water of the well but common language is just like fresh flow water and when we dip into it, our body and mind becomes peaceful and refreshing.So Kabir says,

sanskrut kup jal Kabirā
bhāsā bahatā neer,
jab chāhu tab hi dubai
sāanta hogā sarira.

Some key concepts like *alekha, śūnyapuruṣa, Piṇdabrahmāṇda tattva, guru tattva, nāma tattva, sṛsti tattva* etc. are found in philosophy of both Bhima Bhoi and Kabir. Both the saints were not merely religious reformers but revolutionaries who were vehemently critical of caste-system, ostentious ritualism, idol-worship, priestly mediation which give birth to sectarianism and religious fundamentalism.

Life History :

It is very difficult to give a biographical account of Kabir and Bhima Bhoi as it is shrouded in mystery. All saints of excellence are disinterested about their life as they are not in favour of their name and fame. They are simply interested to serve humanity as the servant of God. Bhima Bhoi was born of a poor parentage and also in the western part of Odisha completely cut off from the mainstream of Orissan culture. Mahimā Swāmi who is the founder of Mahimā Dharma blessed Bhima Bhoi to write bhajanas expressing the basic tenets of Mahimā Dharma which can be easily understood by the common man. Bhima Bhoi became the spokesperson and messenger of this unique dharma. Bhima Bhoi composed innumerable volumes depicting the philosophical aspects of mahimā dharma. Kabir is the forerunner of *bhakti* in Northern India. Regarding his birth the legend is that he was found on a lotus leaf near Varanāsi by childless Muslim couple Niru and Nimā. They adopted the child and took care of him.Though illiterate, he wrote a number of spiritual bhajanas and dohās. When he grew up he accepted Rāmānanda as his guru and his spiritualism was enriched by his guru. But he was not involved in the cult of Rāmānanda as his only mission was

devotion for the lord with love. The saints are never confined to any cult or caste as their aim is to awaken common man in spiritualism. After the death of his father, Kabir was allotted the responsibility of their business of weaving. He was averse to material property, so he handed over weaving business to his son Kamal.He was frustrated as his son was more interested in worldly affairs disregarding the spiritual *sādhanā*. So Kabir says with frustration,

budā bans Kabir kā, upujiye poot Kamāl
harikā sumiran chhadi kei bharlei āayā māal.

Kabir was a revolutionary with a unique personality. He revolted against the priests and mullas who had corrupted the values of society. Hazari Prasad Dwivedi says that such a saintly personality has not been born in the history of last one thousand years.

Nature of Reality :

In order understand the nature of reality according to mahimā dharma we have to discuss reality as alekha, mahimā and śūnya.

Alekha :

Alekha is infinite and indeterminate which has the nature of infinite consciousness that cannot be represented by speech. He cannot be expressed in any finite structure or language,

alekha puruṣa sehu lekhāre na base sehu
asruti amurti go nāhin rupakānti.[1]

× × ×

se rūpaku barnibāku bahuta kathina
akṣara na base jehu na base bachana.[2]

As the poets and philosophers are not competent enough to write about the ultimate reality, so they had the only option to describe him as alekha. Therefore if it cannot be written how it can be expressed in words? Not only now but in the past none was competent enough to write about him as it is beyond comprehension. Bhima Bhoi explains this as follows:

chāriyuge kabi lekhi na pārile,
alekha bolina teṇu nāma dele.[3]

As he has no physical form, so he cannot be expressed in language making it impossible to identify him.He can only be known when he discloses himself by his grace to the aspiring devotee.

*arūpa sarira rūpa nāhin jāra kemante chinhibi muhin,
dayākari mote darasana dia antaryāmi śūnya dehi.*[4]

Similar descriptions are also found in Katha Upaniṣad and Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad. Katha describes Brahman as asabdaṁ, asparsaṁ, arūpaṁ.

Mahimā :

In order to make it clear how the concept of transcendence is built into the notion of alekha and śūnya, the concept of *mahimā* is introduced by Bhima Bhoi. Mahimā is the eternal link among the past present and future and nothing is greater than mahimā.

*mahimānka thāru bada nāhin na saṁsāre,
mahimāhin ātajāta tini jagatare.*[5]
*Mahimā is the dharma and he is pūrnabramha,
mahimā nāmati jehu sakṣāte se dharma
agādha gabheer se atai pūrna brahma.*[6]

Mahimā is so incomprehensible as it requires intense devotion to realise this and it is also self-complete. In order to understand this we have know that it has no beginning or end. He is *akṣaya* (not perishable). He is also called *anādi* as he has no beginning. Bhima Bhoi explicitly explains this as follows:

*akṣaya mahimā se nuhai kṣaya bruddhi,
anādi thāru mahimā atanti se ādi.*[7]

It is also worth noticing that mahimā is so compassionate and gracious that if the devotee has intense devotion for him, he is so kind enough to shower his grace for the redemption of all sorrows and sufferings of the world from the devotee.

*mahimā prasanna hele ki kariba roga,
e tini brahmāṇḍare nische kariba se bhoga.*[8]

One can merge in Brahman if he continuously worships mahimā.

Mahimā bhajile sinā brahma hebeti leena[9]

Śūnya :

According to Bhima Bhoi the infinity of Brahman leads to its allied concept śūnya which means non-categorical. Śūnya has an ontological sense in mahimā metaphysics. It is connotative of the ultimate state that transcends everything. It is the ultimate end or beginnings of everything. There cannot be anything which is beyond it or greater than it.

śūnya māhaśūnya boli tāhāku ti kahi
tānka uparaku āau bada nāhin kehi. [10]

Bhima Bhoi describes explicitly the nature of Brahman in its different aspects. He is embodiment of śūnya (*śūnyadehi*). He resides in *śūnya* as *śūnyavāsi*. His abode is called *śūnyamandir* and he moves in śūnya, therefore it is called *śūnyavihāra*. According to Bhima Bhoi śūnya is indistinguishable from *nirguṇa Brahman* of Upaniṣads which is indeterminate. Bhima Bhoi says:

māhāśūnya se śūnya je nirguṇasarira,
ekakṣara na basei base aṇakṣara. [11]

Infinite Brahman which is indeterminate expresses itself in infinite ways. Therefore śūnya is represented by pūrna or completeness.

akhaṇḍita brahma se gota hoiachhi
kichhi uṇa nāhin tāra pūrna rahiachhi. [12]

He again classifies that he is *pūrnānanda*.

Pūrnānanda pūrna brahma atanti sehi. [13]

Śūnya is the causal matrix of creation, when there was nothing there was only śūnya.

e māti pathara e jala pabana emāne nathile kehi,
śūnya śūnya mahaśūnya andhakāra thilā nisabada hoi. [14]

The *śūnya* owes its origin to the potency of the nameless entity i.e. *alekha* or *anāma*.

niṣabada gharu anāma shaktiru janam hoila śūnya,
śūnya sanchāraru ākāra dhailā bāhār hoila barna. [15]

Kabir says that anyone who understands śūnya can have knowledge of everything but who does not understand this cannot know anything. Buddhism analysing the meaning of *śūnyatā* says that it is *nishvabhāva* and *sarvadharma rahita*. Kabir also says that śūnya is neither light nor darkness. It is eternal. The aspirant who realises the *śūnyarūpa* of Brahman merges in it and becomes Brahman by dissociating himself from the diversities of the world. The śūnya brahma is *pāramārthika satya* and it is *śūnyavāda* of loving devotee. In the words of Kabir;

aise hum lok vedko bichhure,
sunne him main samabāhin re.

Kabir mentions the concept of śūnya again and again,

sunna hi sunna milā samadarsee paban rūpa hoi jabehi re

Kabir says Brahman that is *arūpa, nirākār*. He cannot be seen as he is *arūpa* or unique who can be simply experienced as he is subtler than fragrance of the flower.

jāke muhan māthā nahin
nahin rūpkā rūp,
puhup bās se patlā
eisa tat anūp.

The Lord cannot be described in language. So Kabir says that if you go on talking and talking about the Lord, you will not reach the nature of the Lord,

bolnan kā kahiye re bhāi,
bolat bolat tattana pāi.

Our attempt to describe the Lord shall simply indicate our ignorance. Kabir explains this with an analogy that as dumb can taste the sweetness of molasses but cannot express it in words. Similarly we can experience the glory and gracious nature of the Lord but cannot express it. This experience makes our mind steady and there is feeling of peace and blissfulness.

kahe Kabir ghar hi man mānā,
goonge kā gud goonge jānā.

Both Bhima Bhoi and Kabir apply *neti neti* of Upaniṣads by applying contradictory predications for understanding ultimate reality. Isa Upaniṣad says:

"It moves and moves not, it is far and it is near, it is within all this and it is outside all this'. Katha Upanisād also gives similar explanation "Sitting he moves far, lying he goes everywhere'. In Kena it is said that which cannot be expressed by words but through him words appear. Kabir also says that,

nahin so dūr nahin so niyārā
nahin so tat nahin so siyārā,
× × ×
nadee na nāb dharni nahin khirā
nahin so kāanch nahin so heera.

In a similar tone Bhima Bhoi says,

nuhanti se guru nuhanti se sisya
nuhan sāanta sevaka. [16]

He again clarifies as following:

āpe sevā ghenuthāi, ape sevā kare
āpaṇe achintaā hoi, āpe bhaya kare.
āpaṇe mahāniṣkāma, āpāṇe sakāma
āpe anāmika brahma āpe kaha nāma. [17]

Saguṇa and nirguṇa

There is the necessity of both personal and impersonal aspects in the nature of the absolute.There is no oddity if we describe mahimā both as *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa*. Infinity and personality appear to be contradictory.But this contradiction does not exist anywhere but in our minds.It does not imply any impossibility in the absolute nature of mahimā. Bhima Bhoi therefore says:

nirguṇa brahmati guṇa bhitare thāi [18]

Kabir also describes Brahman both as *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa*. Arūpa becomes rūpa but reality transcends both and that reality according to Kabir is *parāptara* which Kabir says that, *tihun loka bibarjita*'. There he says that Santas should not be deceived by *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa* aspect of reality. He says,

santho dhokā kā so kahiye
guṇame nirguṇa, nirguṇa me guṇa hei
bat chhandi kyā bahiye.

This view of Kabir has similarity with *parāptaravāda* of Vedas, *śūnyavāda* of Buddhists, *adhbutvāda* of the mystic devotees. Kabir clearly says that the terms '*saguṇa* and *nirguṇa*' are mere trick of words. If *saguṇa* is the flower and fruit, *nirguṇa* is the seed. But *tattva* or *nāma* is the ultimate reality. He says:

sattā nāma hai sab tein nyārā,
Nirguṇa saguṇa sabda pasārā.
Nirguṇa beej saguṇa phala-phul,
sakhā jñāna nāma sabka mul.

Piṇḍa-Brahmāṇḍa doctrine

The *piṇḍa-brahmāṇḍa* identity has a history of its own as found in *Upaniṣāds, Gita, Nātha dharma* and *Tāntric-* Buddhism. Bhima Bhoi also accepts this view and says that they are manifestations of śūnyapuruṣa and are regulated by his own command and graciously looks at them which are the same.

adhei dehe achhi, se je na disuchi[19]

× × ×

e piṇḍa-brahmāṇḍa tāar agyān re rahichhi
basilāthāre asesa brahmāṇḍa disichhi
piṇḍa brahmāṇḍaku krupānetre chāhunchhi.[20]

Bhima Bhoi is convinced that everyone has the potentiality to grow into perfection only when the aspirant realises the identity of *piṇḍa* and *brahmāṇḍa*. He says about the status of *piṇḍa* and *brahmāṇḍa* as follows:

Brahman is within your body[21]

Jiva is relentlessly pining for parama with true realisation.
You find both of them at the same place.[22]

Empirical self enjoys and suffers due to its identification with the body-mind complex. Mahimā is the witnessing self. Although the world of particulars have been created by *mahimā*, but it is unaffected by the phenomenal flux in which births and deaths are

points of transition.

sarva jivara karatā thākur paṇe sakatā
nirākār rupise brahma rāsi he. [23]

Mahimā Alekha not only contains the individual and the universe within its own self but remains as the eternal witness.

piṇḍa brahmāṇḍa ku garbha ghatare dhariachha he
sakala bhutare sākṣi parāye puriachha. [24]

Brahman has been described as the witnessing self in Upaniṣads as well as in the Gita. In *Śvetāsvatara Upaniṣad* it is mentioned :

"Two birds, companions (who are) always united, cling to the self -same tree, of these two, the one eats the sweet fruit and the other looks on without eating.' [25]

Gita also says:

"The supreme spirit in the body is said to be the witness, the permitter, the supporter, the Great Lord and the supreme self.' [26]

Kabir also accepts *piṇḍa-brahmāṇḍa tattva*. He follows the dictum of Socrates 'know thy self' or Upaniṣadic statement '*ātmanām viddhi*' and says that by knowing *piṇḍa* or the self one can overcome ignorance and bondage and can attain life-eternal. He points out that sun and moon shine in the *piṇḍa*, but ignorant cannot see it There is continuous melodious musical sound in the body but being deaf, he cannot hear the sound. So is the case with ignorant people involved in ritual activities external to him forgetting his own intrinsic spiritual nature. Kabir describes this as follows:

chandā jhalke yahi ghatmāhi,
andhee ānkhan sujhei nāhin
yahi ghat chandā yahi ghat sura
yahi ghat gajeni anahat toor,
yahi ghat bajei nabal nisān,
bahira sabda na sunei nahin kān.

Kabir says that *piṇḍa* and *Brahmāṇḍa* are identical, they know each other and eager to merge with one another. This kind of relation is explained in the following manner by Kabir:

jalme kumbh kumbh me jal hai
bāhar bhitar pāni,
phutā kumbh jal jalhi samānā
ihi tattva kahyo jñāni.

When a pot is dipped in water, there is water both in the pot and outside it. If the pot breaks, then both the waters mingle and become indistinguishable. Similar is the case with *piṇḍa* and *brahmāṇḍa*.

Kabir further says that *piṇḍa* is just like a lake where *brahmāṇḍa* is just like a lotus flower. The ultimate reality is *paramajyoti*. Though *piṇḍa* and *brahmāṇḍa* are identical, they are not affected by *guṇas* of the body as the lotus flower though remaining in water is unaffected by water.

sareer sarovara bheetara, achhe kamal anūp,
paramjyoti puruṣottama jākhe rekh nā rūp.

Kabir is very clear in his view that the Lord is present in every being without exception.

sab ghat mera Sāiyan
khāli ghat nahin koya.

Kabir says that in order to realise the Brahman you need not go outside, just see the glory of Brahman in your body. He tells that do not go to the garden to see the flowers, you are on the seat of lotus and have the vision of the Lord.

bagon me nā jāre nā jā, teri kāyā men gulzār;
sahas kanwalpar baithke tu dekhe rūpa apāra.

Piṇḍa generally refers to the body. If we can purify the body, the path of *sādhanā* will be clear. God is not present outside or in śūnya. He pervades in everybody. Therefore instead of roaming outside in search of Him, search in your body. Kabir says that you can have the view of *brahmāṇḍa* inside your *piṇḍa*. He beautifully explains this in the following *dohā*:

is ghat antara bāg bagiche iseemen sirjanhārā
is ghat antara sāt samundara iseemen nau lākh tārā
kahat Kabir sun bhāi sādhu iseemen sāin hamārā.

Both Kabir and Bhima Bhoi agree that *brahmāṇḍa* is present in *piṇḍa*. *Piṇḍa* and *brahmāṇḍa* are two expressions of the same reality. The *brahmāṇḍa* which enlightens the devotee by his outside vision he can see the reality within himself by his inward vision. Similar view is also expressed by Tagore in his concept of *Jivan devatā* and *viswa devatā*.

Value of human birth :

Kabir says that human birth is so valuable that he should be cautious for leading a righteous life thinking over the real worth of his birth. He should not ignore this, if he enjoys and go to sleep he shall miss the precious goal of life, so he asks to recognise himself as the platform for salvation. He says,

āaya thā kis kāam ko
soyā chadar tāan,
surat sambhave ye gāfilā,
apne āap pahchān.

Kabir says that human birth is a rare gift of God which may not be available for the second time. It is just like a ripe fruit which falls from the tree and cannot be rejoined again. So human being must utilise this gift for the right purpose as he does not know if he can be reborn as a human being or not.

durlabh manis janam hai,
hoya nā dooji bāar
pakkā phal jo gir padyā
lage nā dooji bāar.

Human beings must have the intense longing for wisdom. The person who does not want to know about his intrinsic nature his life is worthless.

bābare tain jñāna vichārein na pāyā
birthā janam gabāyā

By pointing out the unique nature of human being, Kabir says that he is different from animals who are self-centred but man has the capability to sacrifice his own life for the welfare of all, if required.

yahi pasu pravṛtti hai ki āap hi sadā barei
tahi manusya hai jo manusya liye marei.

The nature of man is the best among all beings. If he knows the glory and gracious nature of Lord Rāma, his life becomes eternal.

mānush janam uttam jau pāwā,
jānun Rāma tau sayan kahāwā.

Though human body is perishable and short-lived like water drops, it is through the body alone, he is capable of attaining *brahmajñāna*. He should make continuous effort to make proper use of the body.If he does not recognize the Brahman in himself his human birth is futile.

so baurā ja āpu na pachhanei
āap pachhanei ta ekei jānei.

According to Bhima Bhoi human body is the abode of *alekha mahimā*, so human birth is the most valuable birth and cannot be regained again.

Mahimā nāmati jehu pratyakṣe manusya,
durlabha janmati ate sarbajña puruṣa.
maunsya janma sāra , e dehe hetu kara,
durlabh janmati āu pāiba nāhin. [27]

Bhima Bhoi says that Lord Jagannatha is within us. So it is not necessary to worship the idol.

Jagannāth is within your body
You unnecessarily worship his idol. [28]

Human body is full of divine qualities, so donot ignore, donot misuse the body as it is one of the best body in *saṁsāra.*

sarvaguṇe paripūrna kariachha abhimāna,
mānava tanu ti e saṁsāre sāra. [29]

Bhima Bhoi says that Brahman is *nirguṇa*. But we can know Brahman through the knowledge of the body where Brahman is potentially present in all bodies.

nirguṇa je brahmajñāna
ebe svadehare chinha,

sarirāthe jñānakara tebe pāiba gochara
se alekha aṇākara achhanti sarva ghatare he. [30]

According to Bhima Bhoi the supreme knowledge is present in the body. It can be experienced if one controls his mind and concentrates on the reality which is hidden in the body. But if anyone does not do this *nirveda sādhanā*, the death may come at any time where your body is lost and one is liable to miss the opportunity of experiencing Brahman. It is not sure whether you will be reborn again with human body. Therefore it is wise to experience the Brahman while living with this body.

e deha chhādile janma nāhin,
kebe janma hebu hetu nāhin.
e deha chhādile kichhi jñāna āu nāhin,
aṇa hele brahma pāibu tu kāhin. [31]

This human body is one indivisible *piṇḍa*. Any attempt to divide this individual reality will bring disaster in the path leading to perfection. So Bhima Bhoi says ,

durlabha sarira gotā piṇḍa,
kimpā karuchha khaṇḍa khaṇḍa. [32]

Avatāra

Bhima Bhoi accepts *avatāravāda* for understanding the link between *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa*. *Avatāra* means descent or coming down. According to Bhima Bhoi, Mahimā Gosāin is the incarnation of śūnya, alekha which is aṇākāra. The question is, if the ultimate reality is free from all imperfections, why should he desire to take a human form and be subjected to the cycles of birth and death ? The answer is, it is an event of divine descent required when there is decadence and degeneration of values. In the Gita, Lord says that for the protection of the good,for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of righteousness, I come into being from age to age (BG, IV.8). Similar view is also expressed by Bhima Bhoi when he says that, the ultimate reality assumes the human form or physical body not as a consequence of his past karma but only for the well-being of creation and restoration of values.

bhakatanka hite bije kale martye,
deekhyā abadhuta nirveda sambhūta. [33]

He is involved in a cosmic sport where he is unaffected by *māyā* which affects ordinary mortals. He descends by his will for the welfare of all. Bhima Bhoi expresses the will of ultimate reality in the following manner ;

ichhāre āsanti brahma parakāse satya dharma
khela karibā nimante āsi vijaya jagate
saïsāra taribā pāin sarva subhe. [34]

Though the Lord is the creator of the *māyā,* he himself transcends the *māyā.* He is not affected by *māyā* and the law of karma. He being the creator of *māyā* is like a magician who is not part of the *māyā.* The illusion does not affect him as he is immortal and Lord of all beings. Bhima Bhoi says that the Lord is not infected with *māyā.* So he explains this in following way

āpaṇā māyāku āpe achhi jiṇi
teṇu tā pākhare na lāgai pāṇi. [35]

According to Bhima Bhoi the avatāra is the timely appearance of Mahimā Gosāin who wanted to relieve the groaning humanity. Avatāra is a complete person, who has in him everything being the Lord of creation, preservation and destruction. Mahimā Gosāin as the avatāra is the source of the entire cosmos in all its forms. So Bhima Bhoi says,

paripūrna angagoti e brahmāṇḍa koti koti
guchha karichhanti roma mulare go. [36]

Mahimā Gosāin, being an avatāra is benevolent and gracious for the devotees. He appears in the human form to show the way to overcome the suffering.

Kabir has refuted the doctrine of avatāravāda. According to him *Nirguṇa Brahman* cannot take the form of avatāra. Avatāra belonging to *Vyābahārika jagat* is the mere imagination of the devotee. Brahman is *nirguṇa,* immortal and cannot be part of birth and death cycle. The view that Brahman appears in the form of human being for protection of the good and for the establishment of righteousness is unjustified.

Kabir was greatly influenced by his Guru Rāmānanda who enlightened his spiritual path. But he could not be associated with this cult. As he frequently used the name Rāma, people thought that he was a devotee of avatāra Rāma which is wrong. His Rāma is *nirguṇa nirākāra* Brahman. In order to clarify this he says;

kasturi kundali basai, mruga dhoonde bana mahim
e sāin ghati ghati Rāma hai, duniyā dekhe nāhin.

Though kasturi is present in the navel of the deer, who roams in the forest in search of it, similarly Rāma is all-pervasive and present in the temple of the body, the ignorant cannot find it outside which is within him. He is devotee of *nirguṇa* Rāma, he declares;

nirguṇa Rāma nirguṇa Rāma japahu re bhāi,
abigat kee gati lakhi na jāi.

By making his *nirguṇa* Rāma more explicit he says that his Rāma is not the son of Dasaratha nor has he killed Rāvaṇa;

na dasaratha ghari qutari āwā,
na lanka kā Rav satābā.

He vehementaly opposes the views on Rāmāvatār by common man who doesnot understand the essence of Rāmanāma. He says,

Dasaratha suta tihun loka bakhānā,
Rāmanāma kā maram na jānā..

Theory of Creation:

Philosophers try to discuss about the creation of the world. Their main prupose is to know the nature of God, man and creation. The theory of creation attempts to explain and locate the ultimate principle from which the world is created and sustained. The creation theory is found in Nāsadiya Sukta of Rig *Veda, Sāṁkhya* and in all philosophical systems. Bhima Bhoi and Kabir also describe and explain the theory of creation. According to Panchasakhās Śūnya Puruṣa is the source of creation who transcends time, space and is beginningless. Bhima Bhoi is of the view that origin of the world of diversities lies in mahimā. He says,

mahimā thāru hoichi alekha brahmāṇḍa,
alekha puruṣa sehu puruṣa akhaṇḍa. [37]

The world of diversities is created from *mahimā garbha* which has the potency of creation. Everything arises from *mahimā garbha* including day and night, sun and moon, life and death and the process continues incessantly which sustains the world and is never destroyed and becomes empty. From the womb of mahimā crores of living beings are created.

mahimā garbharu jāta janama maraṇa
āsibā jibā heuchhi kebe nuhen śūnya,
mahimā garbharu jāta chhapanakoti jantu
sancharita hele nija sakatiru hetu. [38]

All beings and things origin from the power or *shakti* of mahimā. Bhima Bhoi says,

asesha brahmāṇḍe jete deha dharichhanti,
mahimā sakatithāru sarbe utapatti. [39]

According to Bhima Bhoi Brahman is one and non-dual and becomes many as an act of self-limitation. When there was nothing there was only śūnya which is the casual matrix,

e māti pathara e jala pabana emāne na thile kehi,
śūnya śūnya mahāśūnya andhakāra thilā nisabada hoi. [40]

As all diversities are created from Mahimā, he is both immanent and transcendent. He is not a part of the creation like birth and death as he is uncaused and is not created by anyone.

jonire janam nuhen garbhare na ruhe,
samastanku gadhiachhi, tānku gadhināhin kie. [41]

Bhima Bhoi says that there is no contradiction between form and formless as the reality is an all-enveloping being. In *Stuti-chintāmaṇi*, he speaks clearly about this principle.

from the form to formless
from the formless to form
Hari is present everywhere. [42]

We find in the writing of Kabir a systematic explanation of the origin, sustenance and gradual manifestation of varieties of creation. It is clear that he was influenced by theory of creation of Vedas, Upaniṣads and Vedānta. He explains the prior state of the origin of creation in this following manner;

jab nahin hote pawan, nahin pāni,
tab nahin hote srusti upāni
× × ×
jab nahin hote guru na chelā
Rām agamen panth akelā..

Prior to the origin of creation, there was neither water nor air, neither *guru* nor *chelā*. Brahman who transcends the sense-organs was in the state of *svarūpa* or Brahman and was alone, nothing else was there. The theory of creation is represented in *Nāsadiya Sukta* of Veda is as follows:

There was then neither what is nor what is not, there was no sky or the heaven which is beyond. What covered? Where was it, and in whose shelter? Was the water the deep abyss in which it lay?

There was no death, hence there was nothing immortal. There was no light. That one breathed by itself without breath, other than it there has been nothing.

Kabir says that it is incomprehensible to know how from *nirguṇa* Brahman the manifold world with varied content of experience arises. Kabir explains that the world is like an art created by genius artist who is not identified with the art,

jinni yahu chitra banāyiā,
so sancha sutdhāra.

The world is the creation of Brahman by his will power (*ichhāsakti*) which is spontaneous and self-manifested. *Saṁsāra* is a series of becoming which never ends.

According to Kabir the world is created by *māyāshakti*. There is gradual development of world. The first stage is *avyakta kāraṇābastā* which is like a seed and from this stage the subtle becomes the gross. It is the game of *māyā* which does not affect

Brahman. The illusion is to be eradicted by self-knowledge. As in the mind the art is expression of his imagination, so also Brahman is seen as manifested in the world of diversities.

Karma, Jñāna and Bhakti

Bhima Bhoi and Kabir offer a comprehensive view of theoretical metaphysics and practical means to reach the goal of realising spiritual perfection. They deal with the three strands of *sādhanā* i.e *karma*, *jñāna* and *bhakti*. A person in order to be eligible for *sādhanā* must possess moral qualities like truth, non-violence, love, compassion and must conquer temptation, anger and infatuation. Bhima Bhoi Says,

āpaṇā lobha mohaku jñānare kara āyatta
hiṁsā kapata chhanda bāda kutila nibāri kara durānta
rāga hiṁsā tama ahaṁkāra jete ehāku āyatta kara
ehi ghare samaste rahichhanti sadjñānare bichāra.[43]

So a person who practices the moral virtues gives up his ego. His egolessness is manifested in his childlike innocence which makes him fit for *sādhanā*.

bālakamate jebe bhrami pāriba tebe brahma bheta pāi.[44]

Bhima Bhoi accepts non-violence as a cardinal virtue which he says that it is the only better path that leads to perfection.

Kabir also says that maintaining good conduct is the the preparatory stage for spiritual perfection and wisdom. He says:

whoever steadies his body and mind
and tongue and conduct too
shall earn fathomless wealth of wisdom
none can evaluate its value.

So he says that any one who has banished anger and pride from his mind, is kind to everyone and he has no enemy. Thus he enables himself to tread the righteous path of *sādhanā*. He is self-restraint, honest and practices mercifulness, love and compassion for all beings.

jag men bairi koiu nahin,
jo man seetal hoya,
ā ees āpā no dāri de,
dayā kar sab koya.

He also says that one who is firm of truth in mind with deep conviction for truth and truth alone, is shown the proper way for spiritual perfection.

kahei Kabir vichār kari,
wo pada hei nirbān ,
sat lai mana men rākhiye
jahān na dooji āan.

One should be very kindhearted by rendering service to others, he should give unhesitatingly his wealth to the poor. He should concentrate his mind meditating the name of Lord .This is the means to achieve the end, where blessings of the Lord will be showered on him.

tana pabitra sevā kiye,
dhana pabitra kiye dāan
mana pabitra hari bhajan se
is biddhi ho kalāyan.

Karma :

In consonance with the Indian tradition Bhima Bhoi accepts the essential tenets of the doctrine of karma that as you sow so shall you reap' . This means that virtuous is rewarded and sinner is punished . The relation between action and consequence is irrevocable . The law states that even if one does good actions, it leads to bondage. Like the Gita, Bhima Bhoi solves the problem by bringing the concept of *niṣkāma*. According to him, an action done in a detatched manner does not bind the individual because he gives up the sense of doership. So one can exercise complete non-attachment for the consequences since the action is not one's own.

pāpa karithile pāpaku bhunjibe,
punya thile punya bhoga.[45]

Bhima Bhoi's *niṣkāma* not only elucidates how an action is to be performed but also speaks in detail the guidelines as to what one must do, so that actions cease to have their binding influence. One has to do his profession bound by his nature.His view is similar to the concept of *svadharma* as enunciated in the Gita. Bhima Bhoi says:

tāhāra vṛtti se na rakhiba jebe
kekariba sehu karma ,
mukhe jebe guru nāma japuthiba
uddhāra karibe brahma. [46]

Svadharma determines one's station in life. Society is a functional organisation. Among the diverse functions that are essential for the development of society one has to engage himself in duties that are appropriate to him . Any action done in a detatched manner is the moral ideal, keeping in mind the ultimate reality is the agent.

sarvakarmare lagithāa pachhe brahma kari dhari chitte,
gurucharaṇe visvāsa rakhile tari neijibe satye. [47]

Karma performed in consonance with *dharma* leads one to the highest goal. Kabir believes in the doctrine of karma. God has formulated the law that as you sow, so shall you reap. Performance of good acts gives good results and indulgence in evil acts results in punishment. But if you perform acts as will of God that is for the welfare of all without attachment, you will attain salvation.

jo jaisā karihai so tas paihai rājā Rāma niai,
jaisi kahai so taisi kare tarat bār na lāgai.

Kabir further says that be cautious in choosing the right *karma*. Regretting the consequence of evil actions one should not expect sweet fruits from a tree which bears sour fruits.

kartāthā so kyon kiyā ab kyon pachhitāyā,
boye ped baboorka ān kahen se khāyā.

Like Bhagavat Gita Kabir says that you will not be bound by the consequence of action if you give up your agenthood or the feeling that I am doing this and consequence is the result of my

action. God is the agent and all actions are according to the will of God. So he clarifies :

Kabir kiyā kachhu na hot hai
ānkiyā sab hoya,
jo kiyā kachhu hota hai
karatā aur koya.

Jñāna :

According to Bhima Bhoi *jñāna* finds into consummation is the realisation of the true nature of self which is identical with Alekha, which he described as *atmopasanā*. Everyone talks of *jñāna* but it is very difficult to attain it as he has to face many obstacles. Bhima Bhai says,

jñānaboli uchār karanti sarva mukhe,
tāhā na jāṇanti kehi mile kete dukhe. [48]

Spiritual knowledge can be attained when one transcends empirical knowledge. It is the kind of intuition which is possible when one overcomes the circle of birth and death.

śūnya brahmaku he dekhibā jebe jñāna dole
kalpanāku kāti janmamṛtyu menti ekwispuraku jiṇigale. [49]

Bhima Bhoi clearly states that *jñāna* is not possible without the grace of God which cannot be attained by study of scriptures. So the aspirants for *jñāna* have to pray God for his mercy without which his mind cannot be firm and true. To substantiate this view he says :

jñānagharkathā aśruta avyakta
binābhaktire ki labhibu,
to hrudapadmare jñāna jāta hele
tebe sinā tuhi taribu. [50]

We find that *jñāna* and *bhakti* are complementary to each other. Without *bhakti, jñāna* is mere information and without *jñāna, bhakti* is mere sentimentality. *Jñāna* has the healing power to overcome sorrow, suffering and the cycle of birth and death. So he prays :

jñāna mausudhī dei bhala kara na thāu kālakālaku [51]

Sadjñāna is not possible through finite intellect. So one should not waste his time in philosophical debatẹ on logical hair-splitting. Knowledge of Brahman is possible with utmost of humility.

jaṇibāra loke neun huanti na karanti vedavāda
Akhaṇḍa brahmaku khaṇḍa khaṇḍa kale ange pade paramāda.[52]

In a characteristic mode he says that Brahman cannot be seen through physical eye but through divine eye as the Lord is very near to us but appears very far.

Brahmapāse nāma achhi ghodāi kari rakhichi
charmanayanaku go na dise kāhāku
jñānanayane disae dure nāhin pāse thāi
chinhipārile karanti sudaye go.[53]

Bhima Bhoi warns us against so called erudition. An individual having scriptural knowledge devoid of spiritual experience has sense of vanity and he talks inconsistently like an intoxicated person. He states that spiritual knowledge does not refer to any mystic experience but which has inevitable expression in the conduct of the enlightened one. This results in steady expansion of mind and heart which leads to love for all as he has the vision that everything is the manifestation of the Lord.

Kabir was also against scriptural knowledge. Therefore he was in favour of throwing the books into the stream. He was not against fifty two alphabets but one has to concentrate on letters "Rāma'. Therefore he says ;

kabirā padhibā doorkari, pustak dehu bahāi,
bāwan akṣara sodhi kā, raraii mamaii chitta lāi.

He further says:

padhā sunā seekh sabhi, mitee na sanse sūl
kahe Kabir kare kahun, yaha sub dukh kā mūl.

Reading and listening to knowledge of scripture is incompetent to clear any doubt. Doubt or ignorance is the cause of all sorrows and sufferings. So by chanting the name of the Lord, the doubts are dispelled from the mind and man transcends all sorrows.

nirmal teje ramhi jñāna
sabei udani bharmaki thati rahei na māyā bandhi

The person who is not compassionate and who has no love for the Lord, he cannot be called a man and cannot attain salvation as though he is proficient in knowing the scriptures . So in following *dohā* he says:

dāyābhāvā hirdai nahin gyān kathaii behad,
te nara nara nāhin suni suni sākhi sabad.

One who is well-versed in scriptures can deliver the knowledge of scriptures but the words he speaks does not touch his heart.

Kabir Vyās kathā karei bheetar bhedei nāhin

Bhakti :

Bhakti is defined as *bhāva* or a feeling of devotion where the *bhakta* serves God in thought, word or action. Logic and ratiocination plays no role in *bhakti* . For Bhima Bhoi the absolute is not a theoretical postulate but a living entity. Therefore *bhakti* implies an exclusive relation between devotee and the object of love . Though he accepts *śūnyapuruṣa* as *anādi, alekha* and *arūpa* but Lord assumes a form for the devotees. The incomprehensible reality becomes loving and personal God . The type of *bhakti* Bhima Bhoi enunciates is called by him as *niṣkāma bhakti* or *alekha bhakti*. This path is very difficult as this requires absolute surrender to the Lord who is present both inside and outside. So one has to have committed faith in them, then only he shall be eligible for alekha *bhakti* and very few can tread this path.

Alekha bhagati kehi na pāranti
kotika gotie sāra, jehuachha
kehu samartha nuhanti
suddha manare vichāra.
asrūta śūnya agochare bharasā je karipāre
āntare bāhāre se alekha brahma purithāe sabuthāre.[54]

When the aspirant realises that God is omnipotent and all-merciful, the aspirant cannot make himself perfect either by his own effort or with the help of the others. *Alekha bhakti* requires

that there must be complete surrender discarding the idea of 'I' and 'mine' and dedicates himself completely so that he can become a true devotee .

samarpi piṇḍa parāṇā dārā sutta bitta dhana
dhari mate udāsinā niṣkāma manare he.[55]

So for a devotee all his actions are attuned to the nature and will of the Lord .It is the *jñāna* that śūnya is the inner self finds fruition in *bhakti*. It is the *atmajñāni bhakta* who has the vision of the ultimate reality .

keunthāre nāhin sabuthāre thānti
atmajñāni bhaktaku se drusya heichhanti.[56]

Lord himself says that it is very rare to get a real devotee and he is constantly attached to the devotee .The Lord is so merciful that he is infatuated by unconditional devotion of the devotee. So Lord says through Bhima Bhoi,

dekhi tā niṣkāma bhakti
āmbhe na chhādu tāra kati,
bhakata āmar prāṇahita
tenu tā bhāvare mohita .[57]

The duality between the Lord and devotee is dissolved rather there is reversal of role as in this state the Lord desires to be within his devotee. The devotee reaches the highest state and becomes an integral part of the Lord.

Kabir also say that *bhakti sādhanā* is the best path . The person in whom *bhakti bhāva* is not there his life is fruitless and he is in a state of death. The experience of state of *bhakti* is indescribable. So he says,

akath kahāni premki kichhu kahinā jāye.

Kabir says hat the path is not easy .This is not for the coward, it is for the fearless who is prepared to surrender before the Lord everything including his life by uttering the name of the Lord. Without self-surrender the devotee cannot approach him.

Bhagati duheli Rāmkee nahin kāyar kā kāam
sees utāre hāath kari, so lesi Hari Nāam.

Again he says that the devotee can not relish love for the Lord unless he surrenders his wife, children and material prosperity at the altar of the Lord. Kabir's caution is similar to that of Bhima Bhoi though language is different. Kabir says :

prem piyalā jo piyā sees dachhina deya,
lobhi sees na dei sake nāam prem kā leya.

Kabir is devoted to *nirākāra* Brahman, so he has accepted him as the object of devotion ignoring other methods in devotion. So he says,

poojā karun na namāj gajārun
ek nirākāra hirdei namakārun.

Kabir terms this as *bhāvabhakti* by which the devotee is capable of making anything possible which appears to be impossible. So one need not be surprised about this act. Kabir clearly says,

jo jan bhāva bhagati kachhu jāne acharaj kāhe...

For *bhāva bhakti* philosophical debate or religious language is unnecessary. It is through this *bhakti* one can attain the Lord.

kathani badaṇi sab janjāl
bhāva bhagati aur Rāma nirāl.

The devotee intensely desires to surrender before the Lord as he believes that the Lord is the only saviour. Kabir prays the Lord to remove all his sufferings.

ab mohi Rām bharosā terā,
aur kaun kā karaun nihārā.

Again he says,

tumh bin Rām kaban soin kahiye,
lāgee chot bahut dukha sahiye.

Kabir is firm in his assertion that the source of all power and prosperity is the Lord. But the ignorant man without knowing this runs after power. Once he intensely loves the Lord in his heart, the power and prosperity runs after him.

prabhutā ko sab koi bhajai
prabhu ko bhaje nā koi,
kaha Kabir prabhu ko bhajai
prabhutā cheri hoi..

In the highest state of *bhakti* the duality between Lord and devotee is vanished. The devotee and the Lord become one.

ab hum tum ek bhaye hari
ekei dekhti man patiyāri.

At this stage, the Lord is so pleased with the devotee that the Lord's heart is in the grip of devotees. The Lord depends on the devotee providing loving care and protection to them. This is a state where the devotee need not run after the Lord, but the Lord runs after the true devotees, who have cleaned their mind like pure water of Ganga river. Kabir says if I love God intensely, He will run after me calling Kabir! Kabir.

Kabir man nirmal bhayā
jaisā gangā neer.
tab pāchhi lag Hari phiri,
kahat kabir kabir.

Bhima Bhoi was initiated to the guru-tradition. Bhima Bhoi's poetic genius and philosophical uniqueness owes its origin to the grace of guru, Mahimā Swāmi who is the ultimate reality, the founder of the Mahimā cult. Guru is different from the ordinary teacher as his purpose is to impart the highest knowledge i.e. *ātma-jñāna*. The guru shows new horizons of spiritual upliftment of the aspirant.The aspirant acquires self-knowledge by the grace of guru who removes all the misconceptions and ignorance that he has. Hence a person who is established in perfection and has realised Brahman can only be a guru. Bhima Bhoi says that there is no distinction between guru and sisya.

guru sisya duhen ekatva atanti,
antara maṇiba nāhin.[58]

Bhima Bhoi says that the relation between guru and *sisya* is such that they are organs of the same body. Both are devoted to each other.

bhagat angati guru anga jāṇa,
jiba rupe kari bije,
guru charaṇaku sisya bhajuthāi,
sree guru sisyaku bhaje. [59]

The relation between guru and sisya is such that each one is lamented about the suffering of the other. Guru is much concerned about the suffering of the devotee.

Srigurunka anga vyathā heuthile,
bhaktaku lāgai chintā,
bhagat dukha phāndare pasithile,
sree gurunku lāgai byathā. [60]

Bhima Bhoi says that the relation between guru and sisya is reciprocal. Guru is always eager to shower his grace on devotee where as the devotee always aspires for the mercy of the guru.

Sree guru lodai dayā karibāku
sevaka lodai dayā,
benijana tahin eka prāṇa hoi na thāe antare māyā.. [61]

Bhima Bhoi is of the view that in order to know the *śūnya puruṣa* one should not waste his time by studying Vedas. The aspirant should search for a *sadguru* who can only assist him in fulfilling his aspiration for perfection.

chāri sahāstra veda, nāhin se guru pāda,
sadguruku khoja vedare kisa kārya. [62]

In *Bhajanamālā*, Bhima Bhoi says that though each one is potentially divine but without surrendering and serving guru none can rescue him from the world of suffering.

e durlabha tanu guru sevā binu,
bartiba saṁsāre keun jana. [63]

Kabir also says that, the importance of guru is so vital that by his grace the mind of the the disciple which was roaming here and there is feeling restless has become steady. In the ocean of the mind he has collected the most valuable diamond which is nothing but calmness and bliss. Kabir is so devoted to guru that he points out that guru is the only one who can gift us the most

precious things to overcome our suffering. So he says,

āapan pā mana adheer bhayā sadguru deenee dheer,
kabir heera banajiyā man saravora teer.

If Kabir has an option to choose between the Lord and the guru he shall choose the guru who is the only one to show him the path leading to the attainment of the Lord. He says,

Guru Gobinda doei khade,
kāku lāgu pāya,
guru āap balihāri
jo Gobinda dio batāya.

Kabir says that *sadguru* is to be chosen who does not have greed, worldly-attachment and bereft of all doubts. If you get *sadguru* then all the qualities shall be endowed on you and you can overcome all attachments with worldly objects and can have steady mind with similar feeling both in pleasure and pain and you become like a guru. So Kabir advises,

sadguru aisā kijiye, lobha moha bhrama nāhin
guru milā jāniye, mite moha tan tap
haras shoka byāpe nahin, tab guru āpei āap.

Kabir also warns by saying that mere listening to the advises of guru and promising that he will follow all his instructions is not enough. He has to transform his promises in words to action otherwise he will deviate himself from the right path. So guru says,

ek hamāri seekh sun, jo tu huā seekh
karun karun tu kyā kahe, kiyā hai to deekh.

Kabir clearly says that the disciple most purify himself by cleansing his mind with surrender otherwise he cannot grasp the valuable instructions of the guru. In this case the fault does not lie in the guru but in the disciple just as if a piece of cloth is dirty, the dye cannot be retained in the cloth . The fault lies with the dirty cloth not with the dye.

guru bichārā kyā kare sabad na lāge ang
kahe Kabir maili gaji kaise lāge rang.

Kabir has pointed out that it is the guru who has imparted him the easiest method for realisation of the supreme Lord Rāma.

kaha kabir guru ek sudhi batāi,
sahaj subhāi mile Rāma rāi.

The relation between guru and *sisya* is reciprocal. The disciple has to surrender his body, mind and ambition to the guru. Guru, on the other hand, gives a valuable gift, the *mantra* of Rāma and his blessings to reach the highest state of perfection.

pahile dātā sikh bhayā, tan man sate arapā sees,
pānchhe dātā guru bhayā, nāma diyā bakhsis.

Guru is the person who perfects the disciple by strict discipline for removing all the blemishes and imperfections but he is kind enough to protect the devotee from all trials and tribulations he faces in the path of *sādhanā*. Kabir gives analogy of potter and pot to explain this by comparing guru as the potter and *sisya* as the pot. Guru as the potter eradicates all the imperfections by beating it from outside and protects it by holding his hand from inside.

guru kumbhāra sikh kumbh hai,
gadh gadh kadhei khot
antara hāta sahār dai,
bāhar bāhyai chot.

It is because of the grace of Guru the disciple attains *sadjñāna* and realises Brahman within himself in a moment which was impossible for him in his numerous previous lives.

bhediliyā sāath kari , deenā bastu lakhāya
koti janam ka panth thā, pal me pahunchā āya.

Nāma tattva :

Indian spiritual tradition gives importance on *nāma Sādhanā* which opens the door for spiritual perfection for all. This is essential for progressing as ultimate reality is arūpa, who plays the role of nature of *nāma*. It is through *nāma* alone one can liberate himself from the bondage of the world.

Bhima Bhoi though admits alekha mahimā as *anāma*, says that the devotee can reach the ultimate reality by uttering the *nāma* of Mahimā. According to him one has to completely surrender to the *nāma* and be compassionate to all as this is the best dharma available in the world.

nāmare saraṇa jāa, jiva pare dayā baha
e dharmaru sāra nāhin nā saṁsāre. .[64]

Though Mahimā is indescribable and understanding its nature is very difficult as the nature of Mahimā is vast and deep. *Nāma* is *dharma*, the only means to understand him as *purnabrahma*.

Mahimā nāmati jehun sakṣāte se dharma
agādha gabheer se atai purnabrahma. [65]

He also says that *nāma* is the most valuable jewel and it is so omnipotent that by practising *nāma sādhanā* that stone can be transformed to water and fools become wise.

nāmaku bhajile chinhi pāsāṇa huanti pāṇi...
murkha huanti panditā, pāanti jñāna hetu chetā..[66]

Nāma is so glorious that it is inseparable from Brahman which is hidden, therefore invisible to empirical eye but can have a vision of it through intuitive eye.

jñāna nayane disai dure nāhin pāse thāi. .[67]

Pointing about the importance of *nāma* he pleads again and again to everyone to engage in any professional work they choose but can get perfection if they uninterruptedly keep the *nāma* in their heart.

Mahimā nāma is the best *nāma* which gives us liberation and shows the path to become immortal.

Suṇiluki nirākāra mahimānka reeti
Mahimā nāmati jehu jibara mukati,
Mahimā nāmati jehu chārijuge sāra
Mahimā prakash hele huanti amara. [68]

Nāma is the life force of a devotee who can reach his goal by depending on this. According to Kabir *Rāma nāma* is the sweet

of all and is just like nectar. *Nāma* is the supreme giver and his glory is boundless. It is through *nāma smaraṇa* and *nāma japa* the aspirant becomes free from all evil qualities in him. So for Kabir meditation of *nāma* is the best means in the path of *sādhanā.*

Kabir firmly says that oh! man give up ignorance, surrender and worship the *nāma* uninterruptedly for liberation.

kahat kabir sunahu re prāni,
chhādahu manakā bharama
kebala nāma japahure
prāni parahu ek hi sarana.

Kabir has complete faith in *nāma sādhanā.* He tells that *Rāmanāma* is *brahmarupa*. Wherever there is *nāma* meditation, the Lord resides there.

sabda niranjana Rāmanāma sancha.

According to Kabir *nāma* is so precious that when a man who meditates on *nāma* with intense love, there is transformation in his personality. It so happens miraculously that pearls (kind words) flow from his lips and his heart glows with diamond which is nothing but ever glowing Lord.

Kabir Hari ke nāam soon, priti rahe eektār
tan mukhse moti jhare, heera ant na pāar.

Kabir says that our mind is full of gems. If a man uses his mind properly can discover whole mine of gems. The clue is very simple and that is lovingly reciting the *nāma* of the Lord.

Kabeera man parbat hata, ab main pāyā kāni
tānki lagu sabad kee, nikasi kanchan khāni.

Kabir says that human life is very short and death may come anytime without information. So one has not to waste his time in laziness or sleep but remain awake and meditate on *nāma* of the Lord at each and every moment that is given to him.

Kabir nirbhaya Rāma bhaja,
jab lagi deewai bāti
tel ghatyā bāti bujhee
tab sobai din rāti.

Kabir says that there is a stringless musical instrument in our body which sings the name of the Lord ceaselessly and the entire body is pervaded by that which dispels our doubts and makes our roaming mind steady. If one concentrates on that which will lead from imperfection to perfection and thereby there is a transformation of his personality.

Kabir sabad sarir men, bin gun bāje tānti
bāhār bheetar rami rahyā, tāte chooti bhrānti.

According to the view of Kabir all are equal who meditate on the Lord and chant his name. The matter that is present in the container is important rather than the shape, size and quality of the container.

sabei hamre ek hai, jo sumire hari nāma
bastu lahi pahchan ke, bāsan se kyā kāam.

So he says that not a single breath is to be wasted without chanting Lord's name.

Kabir says that reciting name of the Lord is the best path than any other path for attaining mercy and protection of the Lord. Therefore take Lord's name with every breath.

sāans sāans sumiran karau, aur jatan kachhu nāhin.

When one truly becomes a devotee and *jñāni* and performs his *niṣkāma karma*, he is liberated from all sorrows and sufferings and becomes a *jivanmukta* or *brahmasvarūpa*. Kabir says,

janasama dristi seetal sadā dubidha nahin āawe
kahe Kabir tā dās soon merā mana manein.

The liberated person while living in world dedicates his actions for *lokasaṁgraha*. He has no attachment for anything in the world. He does not identify himself with his body or sense organs or ego. He identifies himself with the Brahman who is in his body. He transcends all the dualities of virtue and vice, praise and blame, pleasure and pain - This idea of *jivanmukti* is found in philosophy of Buddhism, Jainism, Advaita Vedanta and Yoga.

Similarly Bhima Bhoi accepts *jivanmukti*. He says that you can have salvation in this life if you realize self-illuminated

śūnya. He says in *Bhajanamālā*,

If you have right experience
You can have the glimpse of the brahman.
This will give you salvation.

Therefore Bhima Bhoi says that liberation is possible while living because *bhakti* leads to this state which includes spirituality, morality and humanity.

Socialistic and Humanistic Philosophy:

Both Kabir and Bhima Bhoi were spiritual humanists. We can find through their writings a metaphysical vision of the reality, a religious perspective, a moral paradigm and a social outlook. They refuted caste-system, idol-worship and ostentious religious practices having ignorance that all are varied manifestation of the Lord.

Kabir is a humanist of spiritual fervour. As all creatures man, animals, birds insects are Lord's creation, one has to treat all with equal footing and similar feeling of love and compassion without making any kind of distinction. So he says that there is no choice for me to be merciful to some and cruel to others.

dayā kaun par kijiye
kāpar nirdaya hoya.
sāin ke sab jiv hain
kiri kunjar doya.

Kabir's concern for all beings does not stem from his theoretical conviction that Brahman is all-pervasive but from the pangs in his heart that he felt for all. His intense love for all is clearly expressed in the following *dohā* :

Standing in the open market
Kabir proclaims 'I crave for
welfare of all
I am intimate to none, and I
am not inimical to any'.

Kabir does not simply crave for his own salvation. He seeks emancipation of both Hindus and Muslims. He talks of Hindus

and Muslims because these two religions were prevelant in the society at that time. He is beyond religious sects like Hinduism and Islam. He does not confine himself in any religious sect. He says :

Hindu turak ke beech main
sabda kahu nirbāna
bandhan kātoon jagat kā
main rahatā rahimān.

Bhima Bhoi was also a humanist of the highest order. He was deeply concerned with the degeneration of values which is the source of all sufferings of mankind. He prays God to salvage men as he is no more able to withstand the suffering of beings around him. He says that he is prepared to court hell in lieu of the upliftment of all.

He wanted to liberate all from degenerate exploitative socio-religious system and to establish humanity on the ideals of universal love and co-existence. He wanted collective salvation *(sarva mukti)* even at the cost of his own salvation. He prays God for such salvation and wishes that all human being should rise above illusion, duplicity, attachment and have an emasculative character :

sambhāla tumar jagat bhagat
e dharmare je achhanti,
kāhāri manare chhanda māyā na pasu
nirmala karāa mati. [69]

The spirituality of humanism in the hands of Bhima Bhoi comes to embrace the whole within its ambit. Every manifestation is the living expression of God. The difference between animate and non-animate is one of degree not of kind. Bhima Bhoi's humanism aims at removal of ignorance and discovery of the divinity in man. We find in him a tension between spiritual optimism and stark realism. When the realist in him makes him lament that people with eyes are no better than blind and people with intellect are directionless, therefore as a spiritualist he wishes the *summum bonum* of life is to be truly human. What is envisioned for his fellowmen was the society

of men and women who not only share and care for one another but imbued with love for the rest of the creation. He prays the Alekha not only to save the human species but also the animals, birds, insects which are none other than kindred selves and the Lord himself.

The humanistic ideal of Bhima Bhoi is based on spiritual values which obviates the evils of materialism and super-naturalism. He had a vision of spiritual community where the well-being of all is protected and man being the most rationally developed ought to shoulder the responsibility of taking care of the rest of creation. The all-embracing love emanating from vision of unity led him to empathise for all.

Bhima Bhoi says that equality is the central concept of humanism. So he is clear in his following statement :

In the abode of Alekha.
Nobody is important or unimportant,
Everybody is blessed equally.[70]

Bhima Bhoi's utter concern for the suffering society is well-known. He was frustrated by looking at the suffering of the people. He says :

I suffer every pang as the sorrows
and suffering of all beings pierce my heart. [71]

He says :

Endless are the agonies and sorrows of living
who can bear to witness ?
condemn my life to hell
but let the world be redeemed. .[72]

The feeling of compassion for the entire living beings stems not from his philosophical ideas of intellect but is deeprooted in his heart. He prays the almighty to save all,

O Lord, save the human world,
Young, old, children, male and female. [73]

A person who is established in *atma-jñāna* has the vision of equality of all things as he knows that all are essentially

manifestation of the Lord. He sees himself in everyone and everyone in himself.

sakala bhutare, eka ātmā prāya dekhe,
samastanku bole mora, muhin atai tumbhara.[74]

An *ātma-jñāni* becomes not an isolated person but a social being. Though it is not a logical doctrine but an ideal to see the universe within himself and oneself in the universe. Bhima Bhoi says,

He considered the mankind as his own brethren
and a part of his soul.[75]

Kabir also says that one who sees all in himself and all beings and things are one is a real yogi *who is* free from all arguments and debates.

sarba bhoot eke kahi jānā chuke bād bibād.

Kabir was in favour of *samadarsi* and accepted him is a representation of Brahman. He says that-

lohā kānchan sam jānahire murti bhagabān.

One who accepts this equal vision is the dearest of the Lord. He sees iron and gold with equal vision.

Bhima Bhoi was painfully aware and vehemently critical of the ostentious ritualism. He says that devotion of to oneself (*ātma bhakti*) is the true devotion. Observance of rites and rituals mutilates against the realisation of godhood. People waste their precious life in mechanical rites and rituals forgetting that it is through love of the innerself that immortality and perfection can be achieved.

japa tapa sandhyā homa yajña teji
dhari niraveda patha,
ātmabhagatire e mṛtyu saṁsāre
mānili mu ekamata.[76]

People mistake the superficiality of religious observance as the essence of religion. According to Bhima Bhoi this is mockery of religion as it does not help one to share the weal and woe of one Ás fellowmen. Priestley mediation is still unfortunate. The so

called places of worship become places for exploiting the simple and credulous. He deplores that the sacred places of worship become defiled. He does not find any rationale behind the practice of pilgrimage. Since God is present in every particle and every place and everything is sacred and every place is holy. Forgetting this the ignorant undertakes long pilgrimage with the hope of salvation. One need not go to caves and temples to find the lord but one has to turn his mind within. God can be served by serving the creation because the created world is nothing other than him. If one looks for the God over and above his manifestations he is bound to be disappointed. So Bhima bhoi says,

na jāṇi chāridigare pheruachha
tirtha brata boli kari,
jahinre lodiba tahin achhanti brahma
bujhiba jebe bichāri. [77]

Kabir's main aim was to satisfy the spiritual craving of man. He strongly denies all the rituals presented in scriptures that has forced common man to tread the path which is far removed from spirituality. So he has asked the pundits in a language where he says that he has presented the spiritual path from direct experience not from scriptures which are claimed to be sacred.

How can there be a meeting of mind between you and me ? For, whatever I say is drawn from my direct experience. But yours is drawn from scared scriptures. [78]

Kabir could not find any justification for going on pilgrimage. For him every place is sacred as human being has spark of divinity. So he says,

jap tap deekhau thothrā, tirath brat biswās,
soowa semal soiya, jyon jag chalā nirās.

According to him by offering to the Lord and visiting temples has no use for him and he suffers like a parrot who tastes the bud of Semira and gets glued in the structure of the bud.

The person who takes bath in the morning and smears *vibhuti* on his forehead tries to show others that he is outwardly a yogi but cannot experience the God who is in himself.

āatam buddhi jānei nahin
nahāe pratah kāla
lok laj liye rahe
lagā bhasam kapāla.

Bhima Bhoi was vocal against the idol-worship. Reality according to him is of the nature of void having no form or contour-*rupa rekha nāhin*, he *śūnya dehi*. Through everything is divine it is not to be equated with any of its finite expression. An idol is inert and lifeless. It can hardly be the limitless craving of the individual which is infinite. A lifeless idol can hardly be a saviour of man. It is the height of ignorance to make worldly offering to God with the hope of redemption.

achetāre sinā janaprāṇimāne karuchhanti deva pujā,
pāde padi rakṣā kara boluchhanti debu khiripuri gajā.[79]

The ignorant are prepared to have loving fellowship with an inert where as the living God is ignored. He deplores how people prefer to worship rather than the one who has invested life in them.

jehu gadhiachhi āpaṇā piṇḍa prāṇa
tāku samarpaṇa nāhin,
dāru pratimā murtiku boluchhanti
prāṇaku banchāa tuhi.[80]

Bhima Bhoi is against idolatry because in accepting idol as the God, the mind of the devotee is confined to the finite object. He thinks that idol is the only divinity and anything other than the idol are un-divine. The idolator locates him in a particular place who is all-pervasive.

Kabir is also against worshipping of the idols. He says that man does not give any attention to the fact that the Lord dwells in the temple of his heart, but he unnecessarily prays the idols in the temple by wasting his time and energy.

tere hiye me Rām hai,
tahi na dekhā jāya,
dil dehurā ke khabari
nāhin pathar te kaha pāya.

Kabir says that I am repeatedly saying with concern that by worshipping idols in the temple to get some reward instead of worshipping God within himself is of no avail. Similarly is the case of rituals performed by Muslims rejecting that Allah is within himself. God is in the heart which can only be realised by surrendering to the Lord completely.

kitne manāun pāun pari,
kitne manāun royā
Hindu pujaii devatā
kurak na kāhu koyā.

Kabir says that all are born as human beings but cunning brāhmins have divided man into high caste and low caste with the consequence of dividing man into conflicting camps.

janam ate manus hota sab
yah jānat saṁsāra
banchat sood (sudra) karabahee
kahei kabir pukār.

Kabir is of the opinion that all men come from the same land and the origin of all human beings are the same but they follow divergent paths being influenced by the world.

āye ekhee desa se, utarei ek hi ghāt,
hawā lāgi joon sansār kee, ho gaye bārah bat ..

Bhima Bhoi was also a crusader against social discrimination. He pointed out that this is a kind of religious obscurantism by floating doctrines by upper caste which made people feel that access to God is the prerogative of few. Bhima Bhoi admits no distinction of caste, colour and creed, since this does not justify the sanction of scriptures.

chhataisa kula je bāuna pātak
je achha stiri puruṣa
ucha nicha vāraṇa na kari nāma re saraṇa pasa. [81]

Bhima Bhoi says that God pervades in everyone. So all are equal. The differences that we find is due to functional multiplicity on the basis one's ability, which is divine play. But this distinction does not contradict presence of the same spark of divinity in

each one. This does not lead to caste-distinction or hereditary classification. Bhima Bhoi says,

tini brahmāṇḍare lodi āsa tumbhe
eka jana eka jāti,
sehi sabuku sata jāti karichhi
tāhār rachilā pruthvi. [82]

Kabir had the vision of humanity as a family. So Kabir asks those who don't see God within himself. The following lines of Kabir are worth mentioning as he asks:

To idol worshippers and idol smashers
To fasting jains and feasting saivites
To vedic pundits and Faber poets
The weaver Kabir sends one message:
The noose of death hangs over all.
Only Rāma's nama can save you. [83]

He revolts against the Brāhminical attitude of treating some sections of people as untouchable. He asks,

Puṇḍita, look in your heart of knowledge.
Tell me where untouchability came from since you believe in it. [84]

Kabir wanted to uproot the vicious and poisonous tree of caste system. As there is equality among all human beings it is not necessary to make any caste distinctions, so he asks the persons why call anyone brāhmin or sudra? He asks,

tum kata brāhman hum kat sood,
tum kata lohu hum kat doodh.

According to Kabir a person belonging to any caste can be a devotee if he worships Hari with devotion, and becomes the dearest one of the Lord.

jāti pāti poochhai nahin koi
Hari ko bhaje so Hari kạ̄ hoi.

Kabir himself transcends caste and religious system. He declares that he is neither a Hindu nor a Muslim. He is simply a toy made up of *panchatattva* or five elements.

Hindu to main hoon nahi, musalmān bhi nahin
panchatattva ka putla, jaibi khelat māhin..

Not merely he ridicules caste system but says that one neednot ask for the caste, but only ask the devotee if he pursues self-knowledge. It is like a sword being evaluated by its sharpness and not by the quality of the case where it is put.

jāti na poochho mādhuri poochh lijiye jñāna
mol karo talwār ka, padā rehne do myān.

So we find a striking similarity between philosophy of Kabir and Bhima Bhoi in metaphysics, ethics and epistemology. Their aim was not to present a philosophical system but to show the common man the easiest path to attain perfection which is the highest value.

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Radical Religious Poetry in Colonial Orissa[1]

Mukti Lakhi Mangharam

In March 1881, an incident took place in the city of Puri, Orissa, in eastern India, that shook brahminical religious authorities, as well as the colonial establishment that buttressed them,[1] to the core.[2] A group of 15 followers of Mahima Dharma, an ascetic religious movement founded in the late 19th century in Orissa, marched to Puri and stormed its famous Jagannath temple compound. The press and police reports of the time make it clear that the Mahima Dharmis, in Puri under the influence of their adivasi[3] guru, Bhima Bhoi,[4] tried to remove the idols of Jagannath, Subhadra and Balarama to burn them, in accordance with their uncompromising stand on idolatry, sacred hierarchies and temple rituals. The reports brand the group as rioters, criminals, savages and fanatics for committing an act so revolutionary that it has been eliminated from the collective memory of an increasingly brahminised community. This willful forgetting is not surprising given that Bhima's devotional verses challenge the authority of the brahmin priestly and intellectual class. Asserting himself as a writer who deserved respect despite his social background, he defiantly declared that his poetry was not the result of any scriptural knowledge, but of his own experiences as a tribal. "It is a jest of my Guru that my eyes cannot see./I mastered no *Vedas* or Sastras compose my verse with my mind, through my experience, peering into the Void" (Baumer and Belt 2010:175).

Bhima (1850-95) was the saint-poet of Mahima Dharma, literally "the glorious dharma", which advocated devotion to an all-pervasive, formless absolute, equally accessble to all, as the way to salvation. This seemingly simple message rendered the worship of idols (murtipuja) redundant, including that of Jagannath, the central deity of Hinduism in Orissa and the state deity for centuries, questioned the hierarchies of caste and kinship Jatigata bibheda), and the role of the brahmins as mediators between gods

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and men. Therefore, Bhima rejected the ritual use of tulsi (holy basil), a.high symbol of Sanskritic and *brahmanic* Hindu identity, and in a radical reversal of social conventions, refused to accept food from brahmins. Mahima Swami, the faith's founding guru, preached in the distant territories of the tributary states, inhabited predominantly by lower-caste, untouchable and indigenous peoples. Mahima Dharma, then, was "doubly subaltern" — it was not only geographically and epistemologically separate from the colonising power, but also separate from powerful groups within Indian society itself (Bannerjee-Dube 2007:8).

Bhima was voicing his challenge to brahminical authority during the same period that Swami Vivekananda, the famous 19th centruy reformer of Hinduism, was bolstering brahminical, Vedic interpretations of Hinduism for the colonialists and educated nationalists in India and the western world. Unlike Vivekananda, Bhima derived his "criticism of the Hindu tradition directly from the tradition itself". (Eschmann 1978 : 375), drawing from the diverse intellectual traditions that Orissa society was steeped in. His devotional verse collections, the *Stuti Chintamoni* and *Bhajan Mala*, identify him with a number of regional intellectual and narrative traditions such as the *panchasakha,* a group of 16th century poet-saints who wrote for the masses in vernacular Oriya rather than in Sanskrit, the language of the educated elite. In doing so, he was also drawing on the legacy of the low caste, 15th century farmer Sarala Das who produced vernacular Oriya versions of the Sanskrit Hindu epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, and who was widely known and revered as *sudra muni*, or low caste sage.

Rather than drawing from the Sanskrit *Veda*s and Shastras of high-caste Hinduism,[5] Bhima got his conception of *Brahman* (the ultimate and impersonal divine reality of the universe) as Alekha, or the "unwritten", as well as his concept of *sunya*, or "the void", from the Nagarjuna Buddhist and Tantric teachings that has influenced rural, tribal Orissa culture for centuries.[6] Bhima drew on symbolic tantric cosmology to portray the divine and the worshippers body as containing and creating the entire universe. His yoga drew on the *tantra* of the siddhas and

nath yogis,[5] emphasising the importance of the subtle body, its *chakras*, and the rising of *kundalini sakti* elements purged by the mainstream Jagannath cults. Further, Bhima's language of *bhakti*, that of devotion and total surrender to the guru who embodies the divine, drew on the influence of Orissa's medieval bhakti poets. His references to the Krishna story also have a slight Vaishnav tinge, though one derived from regional folk theatre, not written texts.

This essay focuses on Bhima's collections of popular devotional verses, the *Stuti Chintamoni* and *Bhajan Mala*[10],wsung even today during the ritual worship of *brahman*. The context of its recitation is a ritual called *dhuni*, devoted to *Alekha*, where a ritual fire is burnt and the verses are recited, accompanied by regional instruments. Diverse traditional, popular and local tunes are used as melodies. The songs are sung fervently by devotees and babas (ascetics), often illiterate, though their content brims with highly philosophical and mystical ideas that are far from simple. The verse structure of the text, which draws on the structure of bhakti poetry, facilitates its function as a devotional text meant to be memorised and chanted by the devotee, while mirroring the logical, "rational" sequence of the philosophy the poetry tries to convey. While Bhima's poetry is composed systematically, "with due regard to metre, rhythm and musicality", and conveys a rational philosophy of social equality, his language is the "twilight language", or "intentional language", the *sandhya bhasa*, full of paradoxes and contradictions or "upside down" expressions (ulta bamsi). It is the mystical, paradoxical language of the Buddhist siddhas and nath yogis." It is characterised by spontaneous rhetoric, as described by A K Ramanujan and developed by Hess, who calls it "rough rhetoric", containing a combination of "rudeness and potency" as well as "simplicity and bluntness of style" (Hess 1987: 143; Baumer and Beltz 2010: 61-62). This is a phrase particularly apt for Bhima, who belongs to the category of grass-roots vernacular religious poets and certainly shares the qualities of spontaneity and "rough rhetoric".

Subaltern and Rational

Bhima's *Stuti Chintamani* and *Bhajan Mala* are counter hegemonic texts in both form and content. As I show in the textual analysis,

Bhima articulates his subaltern consciousness and calls for social change by highlighting the rationality that was the basis of his thought. His focus on rationality is particularly important because, both during his own time and today, his ideas were dismissed as irrational by those at the top of the colonial and religious hierarchies who found them threatening. In the larger colonial context, his conceptions of rationality were very different from those of Vivekananda, who highlighted; the rationality of the *Veda*s for a western audience by charting out a course of Hindu nationalism replete with western scientific discourses of rationality. As I argue, the nationalist-reform movements of which Vivekananda was a pioneer had little or no grass-roots support for their ideas the Brahmo Samaj and Ramakrishna Mission imposed their reformist ideals from above in alliance with the colonial state apparatus and the upper castes.[12] Further, building on Sekhar Bandhopadhyay's argument that Hindu society maintained its cultural hegemony and structure by frustrating reformist endeavours and marginalising dissidence (2004), I suggest that nationalist reform movements such as Vivekananda's were themselves inextricable from this process of marginalisation. Rather than reforming Hindu society into a more egalitarian space, Vivekananda was strengthening its hierarchical structures by consolidating it into an increasingly upwardly mobile upper caste, English-speaking, literate Hindu identity. It is not surprising that he set up secular distinctions between "rational" thought and "mythic" thought by simply suppressing any mythic tantric or ritualistic elements (which were more "popular" than upper caste forms of religiosity) that he found.

Bhima's conceptions of rationality were also very different from those within his own religious community. The dharma that Bisvanath Baba, the leader of the Mahima Dharma sect at Joranda from 1920 to the 1990s, popularised was radically different from what Bhima's thought. It ignored Bhima's revolutionary, dissident or heterodox tenets on the equal treatment of women, his stand against casteism, and his preference for the popular language, the colloquial Oriya. Bisvanath Baba himself wrote in highly Sanskritised Oriya, gave ethical and ritual guidelines, prohibitions and commands, discriminated against women, and recognised

social stratification based on caste (Baumer and Beltz 2010: 39-40). Most importantly for this argument, Bisvanath Baba permanently established links between the sanskritic tradition of Hinduism and Mahima Dharma, underlining that the "new" message of Mahima Swami offered a path of pure, rational, non-ritualistic monism that was Vedic in its valences.

Given the rewriting of Bhima's radical legacy by some of his followers, it becomes all the more important to highlight the unique, and startlingly modern, rationalities that were central to his thinking and in effecting social change. In doing so, this essay follows the example of scholars such as V. Narayan Rao, David Shulman and Satya Mohanty to contribute to the emerging discussion of "indigenous" and "alternative" modernities that aims to "provincialise" European accounts of modernity without resorting to cultural or historical relativism (Mohanty 2008: 5; Rao and Shulman 2003)."[13] Since the dichotomy of rationality verses irrationality often buttresses the conceptual binaries of modern verses premodern,[14] one way to explore indigenous modernities is to explore how forms of rationality arose in non-western cultures.Indeed, one of the most important defining features of modernity, I argue, has been the suppression and devaluing of non western knowledges through-the domination of Enlightenment Reason over reason in general.

Rethinking Modernity

In articulating reason, I draw on Taylor's articulation of minimal rationality as the ability to think critically, which is the legacy of human beings in general. This minimal rationality, as Taylor and Frankfurt have elaborated, consists of, among other things, the ability to be logically consistent, to spearate oneself from one's immediate context to evaluate one's life and one's desires in terms of larger ideas about the world, and the ability to trace one's own cognitive thought patterns (Frankfurt 1971; Taylor 1985). Enlightenment Reason, meanwhile, was the result of a particular movement emerging from a specific historical and spatial location in 18th century Europe. This literary analysis hopes to suggest ways of articulating convincing accounts of comparative modernities by turning to of overlooked texts as

valuable sources with which to rewrite colonial histories.[15] For instance, Bhima expresses theories of rationality in the aesthetic form of religious poetry, very different from the ways in which Occidental philosophers were doing it. Yet seeing it as nothing more than devotional poetry in the colonially constructed epistemic category "religion" would obscure the fascinating theorizations of rationality the aesthetic form enacts. As Mohanty points out, literary readings of such indigenous texts can carry out an interdisciplinary project of historical recovery, thereby reconceptualising "what we often condescendingly call the 'pre-modern'" (2008 : 6).

To highlight just now radical Bhima's ideas of rationality were, I begin with an exploration of how Vivekananda coupled the idea of minimal rationality with Enlightenment discourses of science to lend legitimacy to Hindusim for a western audience and for the high-caste landed aristocracy of Hindus that financed and supported his cause. In doing so, he echoes Taylor's coupling of rationality — the ability to understand things not merely as they impinge on us but outside the context of our immediate goals and desires - with the epistemology of Enlightenment science.[16] By way of contrast, I turn to Bhima who enacts two important and radical philosophies of rationality in his poetry. First, he theorises rationality from within the local aesthetic epistemes of devotional poetry to resist local brahnianic power structures and to carve out a modem theory of identity that relies on an individual's actions (*karma*) rather than his or her fate (bhagya). In the process of enacting a rationality drawn from Orissa's intellectual traditions, he self-consciously traces the logical consistency of his congnitive thought patterns and attempts to understand his own desires in the light of larger ideas about the world.

Second, Bhima couples his rational social critique with a radical positing of secular rationality in the ulti bamsi or upside down language of Orissa's tribal religiosity. Thus I examine how, unlike Vivekananda, Bhima enables us to uncover forms of "secular rationality" in precolonial Indian religion, relatively uninfluenced by western theorisations of rationality. My positing of this universal capacity for "secular rationality", however, does

not indicate the separation of religious and secular institutions in government. Epistemological secularism, according to Talal Asad, precedes political secularism and describes a sensibility or state of mind that distinguished living in myth, magic, ritual and the sacred from a state of mind based on rational understandings of the world (2003).

Further, my use of. this definition implicitly challenges what Jakobsen and Pellegrni describe as Enlightenment secularism, "in which reason progressively frees itself from the bonds of religion and in so doing liberates humanity. This narrative poses religion as a regressive force in the world, one that in its dogmatism is not amenable to change, dialogue or non-violent conflict resolution, separates secularism from religion" and, in the process, "places secularism in a particular historical tradition, one that is located in Europe and grows out of Christianity" (2008:2). Meanwhile, my alternative investigation of Asad's "epistemological secularism", which I suggest is a universal capacity, attempts to unsettle the universalisation of this Enlightenment idea of Secularism and its positing of religion as "irrational", in opposition to the category of the "secular". In doing so, my analysis aims to decolonise the "secular" by highlighting the possibility of comparative secuiarisms that arose in the non-west, thus legitimising the epistemic modes through which subalterns often leave behind their intellectual legacies, and recognising them as modern in their own right.

Vivekananda's Rationality : A Colonial Discourse ?

Vivekananda's writings, I argue, can be read as the result of . understanding rationality mainly through European Enlightenment categories of knowledge, both because these were the ones he held to be superior, and, as Niranjan Dhar has shown, because they enabled him to effectively represent Hinduism to the west and to the British-backed, upper caste and English-speaking Hindu aristocracy that supported him (1977: 134).17 I suggest that while Bengali nationalist reform movements such as Vivekananda's Ramakrishna Mission saw themselves as progressive, they took a top-down colonialist approach that had little grass-roots suport. Rather than reforming Hindu society to benefit the lower castes

and marginalised groups, they were managing subaltern groups for the benefit of the colonising British and for the upper caste Hindus who had managed to climb into the upper echelons of the colonial hierarchy.19 It is not surprising that like European thinkers of the time, Vivekananda believed that Enlightenment science was the ultimate rationality and therefore legitimised Hinduism through extensive comparisons to science. Last, this section considers how Vivekananda glossed over anything that would have been considered irrational by western standards. The result is that the indigenous forms of rationality present in, for example, Radha-Krishna worship or *tantra*, remained unexplored and consigned to the category "irrational".

Born Narendranath Dutta in Calcutta, a colonial metropolis, in 1863, Vivekananda was the chief disciple of the 19th century mystic Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and the founder of the Ramakrishna Mission. He is considered a key figure in the introduction of *Vedanta* and *yoga* to Europe and the USA and is also credited with raising inter-faith awareness, bringing Hinduism to the status of a world religion during the end of the 19th century (Clarke 2006 : 209). As Richard King (.1999) and Ashis Nandy (1988) have pointed out, Vivekananda's reform of Hinduism was heavily influenced by occidental religious discourse and devoted to representing Indian spirituality to the west as rational. In doing so, he was one of the key figures involved in what King has called the modem construction of Hinduism, "a process which located the core of Indian religiosity in certain Sanskrit texts (the textualisaiion of Indian religion), and second by an implicit (and sometimes explicit) tendency to define Indian religion in terms of a normative paradigm of religion based upon contemporary western understandings of the Judaeo-Christian traditions" (1999:105).[19]

This new episteme created the rising perception that Hinduism had become a corrupt shadow of its former Vedic self, and that the gap between the original Hinduism and contemporary Hindu beliefs and practices had to be filled by nationalist Hindu reform movements such as the Brahma Samaj and Vivekananda's

Ramakrishna. Mission. Vivekananda took on this task with gusto. His thought was developed during attempts to influence western views of Hinduism over two very long trips to the US in the 1890s when he founded a *Veda*nta Society in San Francisco and a Shanti Ashrama (peace retreat). Returning home from his first trip, which began in 1893 and lasted till 1897, he conducted a whirlwind speaking tour in India, and launched a number of English language journals for foreign as well as domestic subscribers. For instance, *Prabuddha Bharata* ("Awakened India") stated its objective was "to present the truths of the Hindu religion and the *Veda*nta in a simple and homely style, illustrating them by means of Puranic stories, philosophical tales and novels, and by the lives of great saints and sages" (Aravamudan 2005 : 29). This periodical was a sophisticated theolinguistic organ, featuring stories of Vivekananda's missionary work, even as it retailed advertisements for photographs of spiritual leaders', "Hindu" timepieces and books on Indian religion (Aravamudan 2005:55).

Vivekananda's ideal of rationality was clearly fashioned according to what a western audience would find compelling and engaging. More specifically, it was fashioned according to the dictates of European Enlightenment philosophy, where science was the epitome of the rational, to lend legitimacy to Hinduism. Thus he used Enlightenment science to back his representation of rationality in the Hindu philosophy of non-duality, or *Advaita*, which argues that the self does not exist separately from the divine (*brahman*). The concept of *Dvaita* describes the opposite, a god outside the self whom one must worship. According to Advaita, this concept of the god outside oneself is the unfortunate result of *maya*, which describes the limited, purely physical and mental reality in which our everyday consciousness has become entangled. May a survives by preventing the individual from becoming one with, or attuned, to *brahman*. The aim of every human life, or *moks* (spiritual salvation), is the union of the soul with this truth, with *brahman*, a condition that Vivekananda sums up as "unity". He justifies non-duality, his ideal of the ultimate rationality.

Science is nothing but the finding of unity. As soon as science would reach perfect unity, it would stop from further progress, because it would reach the goal... chemistry could not progress further when it would discover one element out of which all others could be made. Physics would stop when it would be able to... discover one energy of which all the others are but manifestations, and the science of religion become perfect when it would discover Him who is the one life in a universe of death. All science is bound to come to this conclusion in the long run... the Hindu is only glad that what he has been cherishing in his bosom for ages is going to be taught in more forcible language, and with further light from the latest conclusions of science (Vivekananda 1964 : 14).

Here Vivekananda uses the examples of chemistry and physics to suggest that they all point to the "unity" apparent in his nondualist Hinduism. The most important discovery that physics and chemistry can make is discovering the "one energy", or the "Him" from which all life comes, and all science at its core is engaged in gathering more and more evidence to bolster this point of view.

Enlightenment Science

Further, while science can provide evidence for non- dualism as the ultimate truth of the universe, it must not be regarded as higher than Hindu philosophy because the *Veda*s preceded European science in founding key scientific principles.

There are theories in the Vedic philosophy about the origin of life on this earth very similar to those which have been advanced by some modern European scientists. You, of course, all know that there is a theory that life came from other planets. It is a settled doctrine with some Vedic philosophers that life comes in this way, from the moon (Vivekananda 1964 : 130).

Vivekananda therefore refers to Raja yoga (cultivation of the mind through meditations) as a science rather than a philosophy. "The science of *Raja yoga* proposes to put before humanity a practical and scientifically worked out method of reaching the divine truth". He further elaborates on the precision and empiricism suggested by "practical" and "scientifically worked out method".

In science a certain method must be followed. You must go to the lab, take different substances, mix them up, compound them, experiment with them, and out of that will come a knowledge of chemistry. If you want to be an astronomer, you must go to an observatory, take a telescope, study the stars and planets, and then ..ou will become an astronomer (Vivekananda 1964 91)

In other words, Vivekananda's Hinduism is as rational as Enlightenment science was projected as being, with just as much of a precise empirical method through which to arrive at results.

The problem with this, of course, is that. Vivekananda, and the reformist religion he led, ignored the actual specificities of Hindu rationality, particularly any aspects that would be considered. "irrational" according to Enlightenment epistemes. His dismissal of the "irrational" from Hinduism meant that the indigenous forms of rationality present is for example, tantric forms of worship, remained categorized as superstition, rather than being seen as "rational" in their own right. Just how much these forces were at work in Vivekananda's version of Hindu rationality is clear from his representation of his guru, Ramakrishna, and the Ramakrishna Mission as the embodiment of his idea of a universal religion free of idol worship or tantrism, and of symbolic, ritualistic aspects. *"Ay, long before ideas of universal religion and brotherly feeling between different sects were mooted and discussed in any country in the world, here, in sight of this city, had been living a man whose whole life was a parliament of Religions, as it should be"* (Vivekananda 1964: 235).

This did not only involve diluting the specificities of Hindu religiosity into a whitewashed, general "universal religion", but also actively hiding those aspects that would not be acceptable to a "Parliament of Religions". Ramakrishna, whom Vivekananda first met in November 1881, did believe in the worship of deities — he had been a priest of the Dakshineshwar *Kali* Temple, dedicated to the goddess *Kali,* which was influenced by the main strands of the devotional Bengali bhakti tradition. Ramakrishna was also a *tantric*, or someone who studied the use of the body as a vehicle towards *moks*, or salvation, in both sexual and non-sexual ways; his first spiritual teacher was an ascetic woman skilled in

tantra and *Vaishnav bhakti*. Vivekananda actively overlooked these elements, taking up only those elements of Ramakrishna's thought that supported his theories of non-dualism.[20]

In his quest to refashion Ramakrishna's religious sensibility into one agreeable to a western audience, Vivekananda adamantly worked to rewrite Ramakrishna's biography so that few of these elements survived. As Narasingha P Sil has shown, he cautioned biographers to avoid "*all irregular indecent expressions about sex because other nations think it the height of indecency to mention such things, and his life in English is going to be read by the whole world*". He wrote to another biographer, "*Take thought, get materials, write a sketch of Ramakrishna, studiously avoiding all miracles. The life should be written as an illustration of the doctrines he preached.*" Vivekananda also preached against Radhakrishna worship, something that would have sorely troubled his master. In April 1897, he wrote to the latest Bengali biographer of Ramakrishna, "*There is not the least necessity for teaching the divine love of Radha and Krishna. Remember that the episodes of the divine relationship between Radha and Krishna are quite unsuitable for young minds.*" *Later he elaborated,* "*And wherever you hear the Radha-Krishna songs going on, use the whip right and left. The whole nation is going to rack and ruin ! People with no self-control, indulging in such songs !*" (Sil 1993 : 38-62). Further, idol worship for Vivekananda was a stunted, infantile version of rationality that humans took part in when they were not capable of anything better. The scriptures say;

External worship, material worship is the lowest stage; strugglingto rise high, mental prayer is the next stage, but the highest stage is when the Lord has been realised... One thing I must tellyou. Idolatry in India... is the attempt of undeveloped minds to grasp high spiritual truths... Idols or temples or churches or books are only the supports, the helps, of his spiritual childhood: but on and on he must progress (Vivekananda 1964:15-18).

Vivekananda had no time for deities or their tantric associations; his dismissal of the "irrational" from Hinduism and his reframing of Hinduism into a "Parliament of Religions" relegated indigenous forms of rationality present in, for example, Radha-

Krishna worship, to the category of "superstition". Unlike Bhima's rationality, he also fashioned Hindu religiosity into a mirror of western religiosity by actively seeking out the west as its main influence and audience. In the process, Vivekananda bolstered the cultural hegemony of the upper caste Hindus who financed him.

Rational Others : Bhima

Like Vivekananda, Bhima practised and theorised his own conceptions of religious rationality, but he did so through devotional poetry that tapped into forms of "popular" religiosity that were becoming increasingly marginalised by movements such as Vivekananda's. I turn to his work, as well as the various religious and intellectual traditions from which he drew inspiration, as examples of how rational states of mind arose in precolonial India in forms of knowledge now classified as "religious". This section begins with an exploration of the form Bhima's devotional poetry took, before tracing the specific rationalities in his poetry. Then drawing on Taylor and Frankfurt, I outline the three distinct ways in which Bhima asserted his rationality. He consistently detached himself from his immediate context as a poor, low caste tribal to evaluate how his life fit into larger ideas about the world, he reflected on and evaluated his own desires and will in the light of his position as an outcast, and self-consciously traced his own logical and cognitive thought patterns within his verse. His practice of these forms of rationality was inextricably linked to his radical political politics of equality.

One reason why Bhima's devotional verse may not have been recognised as carrying out the rational work that it does is that it has been judged by foreign epistemic and aesthetic categories. For instance, unlike Occidental thinkers, Hindu aestheticians have not always accepted poetry as one of the fine arts. The acharyas, or learned ones, did not even classify poetry as one among the 64 artistic skills (*chaunsath kalayen*). Rather, poetry was seen as a vidya, or form of knowledge, and a way of philosophising, while other forms of art were *upavidyas*. The form of Bhima's poetry becomes double significant if seen as a vehicle through which he explored philosophical truths rather than simply an art form

devoted to sensory pleasures. Indeed, Bhima's verses and bhajans (singing the glory of god through a dialogue between mind, mana, and consciousness, chaitanya) are suffused with wishful prayer and yearning for the spiritual uplift of human beings.

The poetic form of Bhima's devotional lyrics rendered it a form of philosophy according to Orissa's epistemic categories. In line with the importance of the message he wanted to convey within his poetry, Bhima structured his verse with strict attention to form, with the number of his poems, stanzas and lines written line by line in prose style, forming a repeated pattern. The manuscript of *Stuti Chintamani* contains 100 boli (poems), each of 40 lines. Every two lines make a stanza, each boll contains 20 stanzas, and each line contains exactly 20 letters. Bhima's stringent attention to these numbers is shown by his noting of the exact number of stanzas so far composed after every five boli. The whole book, he notes at the end, contains 2,000 stanzas in 100 boli, drawing attention to the magnitude of his work, and by corollary his devotion to *Alekha* and importance of his radical social message. Bhima also drew on the structure of *bhakti poetry* to formulate his text, facilitating its function as a devotional text meant to be memorised and chanted by the devotee. *Bhakti poetry* starts with a ghosa or refrain repeated by the entire group of devotional singers and ends with a "signature line" expressing a prayer or an intense feeling. That the aesthetic form of the *Stuti Chintamani* is suitable for memorising is not surprising given that this text was and is still largely transmitted orally, though a number of palm leaf manuscripts exist, Although these aspects are difficult to see in the written English translations I quote, I emphasise the way the logical sequence of the verse structure mirrors the rational progression of Bhima's thought and his investment in the merits of rationality.

Overcoming *Maya*

Bhima uses his devotional verse to reflect three major explorations of rationality. The first is the ability to separate oneself from one's immediate context to evaluate one's life in terms of larger ideas about the world. In line with this notion, Bhima argues that the self can only unite with *brahman* once one extricates oneself

from *maya*. *Maya* describes our immediate context, the limited physical and mental reality in which our everyday consciousness has become entangled such as, for instance, the trappings of wealth and status. *Maya* must be overcome in order to attain *moksa*, or salvation, achieved not through any external rites or pilgrimages but through an intense meditative path, through a deep cleansing of the doors of perception till one is attuned to *brahman*, and therefore, to the universe.

This journey of overcoming *maya* to become attuned with one's own spiritual wealth is suggested by the title of Bhima's verse collection itself. *Stuti Chintamani* literally means "eulogy to the thought jewel", a mythical wish-fulfilling stone described in Nagarjuna Buddhism, which was an influerce on Bhima's thought. The mani (jewel) was said to manifest whatever one desired, including treasures, clothing and food, while removing sickness and suffering. However, *Chintamani* also describes the teachings and virtues of "the enlightened one", the being who has reached *moksa* and is able to reflect on all states of the subconscious mind, including the ones tied up with *maya*, while not being defined or entrapped by them. Devotion to the enlightened *Chintamani*, the being who possesses supreme knowledge of these states of mind, is the path to *moksa*. Bhima's title contains a play on metaphors of material as well as spiritual wealth, and as I demonstrate, his message concerning both was one with radical implications for the society in which he lived.

Bhima demonstrates his rational ability to understand his own desires in the light of larger ideas about the world by pointing out that being blind to one's immediate material circumstances, which represent *maya*, is acceptable as long as one has the ability to see within oneself and acquire spiritual wealth. He therefore describes *maya* using the metaphor of darkness: *"There is no lamp/ You keep the house dark* " (Satpathy 2006 : 45). This is a radical point, one that turns Bhima's lamentable cricumstances as a poor and possibly blind tribal into a strength because it emphasises that the value of a person should come from within rather than from socially constructed hierarchies. It is a rationality in line with Bhima's protest against social inequalities such as casteism

and sexism. He therefore, denigrates the rich and powerful who disregard the spiritual values he tries to impart.

Their minds are steeped in ignorance
And wicked are the high born.
When I speak of you as without desire,
Oh Swami, they just twist their moustaches in pride
(Baumer and Beltz 2010: 127).

The "high born", or those born into a higher caste, are "wicked" because "their minds are steeped in ignorance" and false pride. Bhima conveys their investment in the trappings of *maya* by describing their ignorant pride in their moustaches, even though, according to spiritual rules, brahmins are generally supposed to be clean shaven.[21] Bhima asserts instead that true material wealth is that which comes from spiritual devotion.

What you gave me is merely a glance.
Of compassion, grace and mercy.
I paid you back with my devotion and service.
What remains of my debt or its interest ?
(Baumer and Beltz 2010: 215).

In this verse addressed to the divine, Bhima measures material riches through spiritual metaphors such as "*compassion, grace* and *mercy*", which he "pays back" not in monetary terms but through "devotion and service". His use of fiscal metaphors conveys that the riches of spiritual enlightenment are much more valuable than financial rewards. He reinforces this point by ending with a question that challenges his listeners, asserting that there should be no question of "debt or interest" because "devotion and service" are more valuable than external signifiers of wealth and rationally distancing himself from his immediate external circumstances to understand himself in relation to the larger spiritual truths he values.

The emphasis on valuing a person according to his or her inner being rather than the external trappings of *maya*, such as material wealth and social status, is reinforced by the hagiographic legends that surround Bhima's existence and which he actively propagated in his lifetime.

According to one of these. When Mahima Swami, Bhima Bhoi's guru came to visit him, the blind Bhima said, "If you have come to bless me let me be able to see you." And then he could see. He came out and saw the two seers standing outside like the "Sun and Moon". Mahima Swami blessed him with the intense power of poetic vision and said that he had a preordained role to play in the propagation of the tenets of the Mahima cult in this century. Bhima prayed to him:"0 Lord, with the power of vision you gave me I have seen your divine feet but I don't want to see all the dirt in this world. Bless me that the outside world remains invisible to me." The Swami blessed him saying: "*Let your inner eyes open and the external eyes close as before.*" Bhima again went blind.[22]

Here, sight funcfons as a metaphor of enlightenment, and Bhima stresses that true "sight" does not require the functions of the physical body. These legends reinforce the point that moksa can only be reached by concentrating on the inner self through intense meditation, rather than through a focus on the external self and the requirements of the physical body. Only those who go down this path of spiritual self-awareness will be able to overcome *maya* and become one with *brahman.*

Since one must detach oneself from one's immediate context to achieve moksa, in some of his other devotional songs (bhajans), Bhima focuses on the inner world of the self, describing only the physical landscape to emphasise a shimmering landscape of the inner world.

There is no tree nor its roots
Yet its shadows lengthen
There are fruits without buds or flowers
The leaves expand without stalks
And he is reached through the path of actionlessness
(Mahapatra 1983: 57).

Here, Bhima metaphorically displaces the immediate physical reality. "There is no tree nor its roots", no buds or flowers, no stalks, there are just the effects of these things on the internal world of the self. For Bhima, a rich, spiritual state of being can yield the productive, meaningful aspects of life without

the pleasant, yet ultimately unnecessary, objects that produce them, such as stalks, buds, flowers and trees. The devotee can benefit from the true riches of the world while forgoing those that do not really matter. He can enjoy the welcoming shade that trees provide, although not the tree itself; he can satisfy his hunger with fruit from the tree but not smell the fragrance of the flowers that usually accompanies the fruit. The final sentence "*and he is reached through the path of actionlessness*" suggests that these images are metaphors for a flourishing inner state of mind, one that needs only "actionlessness", or the introspective journey of the mind, to achieve equivalents of sensual pleasures such as a flower's scent. Bhima's "actionless" journey enacts a self-aware quest to dissociate the self from *maya* and connect it with larger spiritual truths attained through meditation.

Bhima's verses also enact another rational practice — that of being able to reflect on one's own desires. As Frankfurt argues, one form of rationality that makes one human is the ability to be self-aware and self-conscious about one's own desires by tracing one's own cognitive thought patterns. Bhima's complaints enact this cognitive rationality by separating those desires that are,linked to *maya* from those that he feels deserve to be satisfied. He therefore rebukes himself for longing for wealth and status that is unreasonable or undeserved.

My heart always longs for tapasya
And to chant the One-lettered Name
Yet I am unable, entangled as I am
In many worldly desires.

(Baumer and Beltz 2010: 105).

Here Bhima rues himself for desiring the worldly desires that "entangle" him and distract him from his *tapasya* , or spiritual practice, and wishes to distance himself from these "sins" of longing. "Just as darkness cracks up when the Sun's rays fall on it, similarly 0 Lord cut away my sins with the sword of knowledge. Just as when the moon rises at night, light shines everywhere; similarly abolish the burden of my sin 0 Lord" (Mahapatra 1983 : 71). Once again, Bhima uses

the Sun and Moon metaphor of light displacing darkness. Yet, as before, the sun and the moon are not symbols of physical reality, but of Mahima Dharma's gurus, who will lead to inner light, inner knowledge and "abolish the burden of my sin". Bhima is self-consciously describing objective, rational act of reflecting and evaluating his own desires for undeserved wealth or status, a process key to extricating himself from *maya* and achieving *moksa*.

Reasonable Desires

While Bhima is able to recognise which of his desires are unreasonable, in his enactment of cognitive rationality, he also recognises the desires that are reasonable. At a radical point Bhima asserts that he deserves to have his basic needs met. Thus he tempers his emphasis on the value of one's "inner self", that responsible for producing one's thoughts and actions, by stressing that being detached from the material world does not mean that he does not need any material comforts. While he refers to being caught up or entrapped in the illusion that is one's material reality in negative imagery, he also stresses that to escape from *maya*, a "shelter" of some sort is needed.

Where shall I Go
Where shall I find Shelter?
I do not really know.
Unruly Maya assaults
Again and yet again.
How long shall I bear it ?

(Satpathy 2006 : 45).

"Shelter" works at both a literal and a metaphorical level here. At the metaphorical level it signifies the mental strength needed to conquer a *maya* that is all encompassing and inescapable. Bhima reinforces the overwhelming power of *maya* through the verse form, which begins with a question and ends with one, and through the alliteration of "assault" and "again and again". One of the central lines of the verse takes a break from the questioning and states "I do not really know", capturing his hopelessness.

However, "shelter" also works at the literal level. Elsewhere, Bhima makes the point that if one's material wealth derives from one's inner state of mind, he and his fellow devotees should not be treated like dogs and consigned to poverty just because they are *adivasis* or members of a lower caste.

I get easily neither food to eat
Nor clothes to wear.
My life is lowly, I am an outcaste.
I know not when I shall receive your grace.

You are the great Lord and Creator, yet all is in vain.
You have given me this body,
Yet my most basic needs you have not met.
What justice is this, Oh Lord ?
(Baumer and Beltz 2010: 123).

In the Oriya original, "basic needs" refers to *manda*, the word for gruel. Bhima is not talking about his desire for the lord to grace him with material wealth, a desire he dismisses as "sinful", but simply asking for basic clothing and enough food to eat, that too of the quality just needed for him to survive, Asserting his basic rights, Bhima demands "justice", making the modern point that there are some things that deserve to be satisfied just by virtue of his humantity.[23]

Modern Notion of identity

While asserting the innate dignity of himself as a human, or in the religious sense a soul that contains *brahman*, as the reason he deserves his basic needs met, Bhima simultaneously contends that he also deserves that which he works for.[24] In doing so, he makes a radical point, tying the value of an individual and what he or she deserves, not to traditional notions of gender and caste-bound identities that are static and inescapable, but to modern notions of identity that are tied to the value of the work an individual does. Bhima outlines and links this rational and thoroughly modern idea to the Hindu notion of *karma*, the law that proclaims that one's past actions determine one's social status as well as the good or bad events in one's life. He writes,

What you have written I enjoy,
Following the unseen Karma
I fill my belly with a morsel of food
That I earn from daily toil.
(Baumer and Beltz 2010:103).

Bhima begins by referencing the widespread belief that *karma* is linked to fate. *Brahman* has "written" "unseen *karma*", determining. A soul's fate without the soul being able to see its destiny, let alone change it. Bhima, however, turns this on its head, transferring a theological point which generally refers to how actions in one's past life decide one's static and rigid caste identity in the next, to a modern notion of identity in which one can change one's current circumstances accordirig to one's own actions in the present. Thus the *karma* Bhima is referring to is not "unseen" after all; it is the result of carefully calculated rational action. He highlights the fact that he fills his belly with food that "*I earn from daily toil*". The word "earn" reinforces the notion that the food he eats is directly the result of his actions.

Bhima also enacts his rationality by self-consciously recognizing the logical consistencies in his cognitive thought processes. His devotional verse expands his argument that the value of an individual not only comes from his inherent worth as a "soul" issued from *brahman*, or in secular terms, just by virtue of being human, but also from his actions. He therefore, traces the relationships between cause and effect to reinforce his point that identities are made according to one's actions rather than being fixed and unconditional.

If the pandit or a poet does not study,
Knows not the auspicious and inauspicious times,
If he is without his almanac or chalk or betel-nut,
How can he understand virtue and vice ?

If a yogi is mad for sense-objects
And cares not for yoga-sadhana,
If he has no faith in the practice of mind-and-breath,
How can he perform his tapasya ?

If a brahmin does not fulfil his ritual duties,
And follows not the Vedas, if he repeats no mantra,
If he does not practice the three times of prayer,
And offers oblations to the dead, then he is of no use
(Baumer and Beltz 2010 :107).

Here, Bhima explores the logical links between a person's actions and the outcomes of those actions; if a yogi is mad for sensual objects, how can he perform his *tapasya* , or spiritual practice, since the very definition of *tapasya* is to detach oneself from the pleatures of the senses ? And if a brahmin does not fulfil his ritual duties, he "is of no use" as a brahmin, since the very definition of brahmin is to fulfil these rites. Apart from the logical consistency in these statements, they alto make a radical social point. A brahmin is not a brahmin unless he does his duty, just as a pandit or a poet cannot understand virtue and vice if they do not study these things. There is no such thing as an identity that one is born with; identities are constructed through one's actions. The corollary of this is that *brahmins* do not deserve their place at the top of the social hierarchy anymore than anyone else does. As the verse progresses, Bhima uses his highlighting of the logical schema of cause and effect to make increasingly controversial claims. Having prepared the rational grounds for fewer objections from fellow devotees and listeners by starting with the less subversive examples of the poet, *pandit* and *yogi*, by the end, he is questioning the fixed nature of *brahmanic* identity by the same logical sleight of hand. Indeed, he is so bold that by the last two verses, he is challenging Brahma's unconditional right to be called the creator, and Lord Vishnu's unconditional right to be lord of the universe.

If Brahma did not create
The body of three qualities,
And if he cares not for birth or destiny,
Then how can he be called the creator ?
If Lord Visnu does not nourish the 56 crore creatures,
If he does not recognise the Self
And protect the Dharma,
Then his lordship is not justified
(Baumer and Beltz 2010 :108).

Even the divine are not spared Bhima's radical rational practice. Thus he makes the point that identities are constructed, not random, and rely on one's actions. Further they are not static but based on changing socio-political contexts that need to be questioned when they do not meet the needs of those who deserve better.

Secular Rationality ? Tantra, Ritual and Deity Worship

This section examines how Bhima's radical rationality in *Stuti Chintamani* and *Bhajan Mala*, while positing a modern politics of social equality, also demonstrates that precolonial Indian thought did possess secular distinctions between rational thought and mythic thought (notably different from Enlightenment definitions of the secular). And those categories of the modern, such as the epistemological "secular rational" I defined earlier through Asad, arose from indigenous epistemologies, before and during colonialism, relatively outside the influence of colonial epistemologies. In tracing these forms of rationality, this section argues that, often, epistemologically secular understandings with their distinction between myth, magic and ritual ideas of the world and rational ideas of the world were rooted in what European thought classified as "religious" belief so that the secular arose from within "religion" itself.[25]

Why is tracing secular understandings in Bhima's poetry so important ? Doing so implicitly questions the sharp Orientalist distinction between modern/ philosophy/ rational/ thewest and premodern/ mysticism/irrational/the non-west. It was this binary which Hindu nationalists' such as Vivekananda set out to change when they asserted the inherent rational monism that was supposedly central to Hinduism. In doing so, however, they used the very Judaeo-Christian frameworks they thought they were resisting, focusing on the glorification of the textual *Vedas* and *Shastras*, while denigrating the use of rituals, idol worship and mythology. Thus this section also asks whether it is possible to find rational states of mind in "religion" without obscuring aspects such as symbolic ritual and idol worship that western models of rationality would

classify as irrational. I argue that Bhima destabilises colonial binaries but without whitewashing the bread and butter of Hindu religiosity, those supposedly "irrational" aspects of religious life that the subaltern tribal groups of society thrived on and which were central to their intellectual thought.

In the literary analysis which follows, I explore Bhima's "irrational" modes of worship through his *ulti bamsi*, examining how his *sadhana* (act of purifying the mind), which included the yogic practice of meditation, tantric symbolism, and the contemplation and worship of deities such as Krishna, was inseparable from his rational thought processes. In doing so, Bhima differentiated states of living in myth, magic, and ritual that involved rational understandings of the world from those that did not, therefore, positing a secular rationality that distinguished between different forms of mystic religiosity.

Continuity of Rational Thought and 'irrational' Practice

In my analysis of Bhima's rationality so far, I have emphasised his cognitive processes, drawing attention to his abandonment of ritual, idol worship, pilgrimages and the mode of the symbolic for intense cognitive introspection and meditation that articulated a radical politics of rational social equality. Bhima defiantly declared his rejection of idol worship, "I do not bow to gods and goddeSses, to idols of clay and stone. 0 Lord, In search of liberation, I meditate on you" (Satpathy 2006:38). His poetry highlights the revolutionary nature of such ideas by drawing attention to the opposition he faced from those who fumed that "devotees of Mahima do not care for Vedic diktat... they have dumped in the neither world all the rites and rituals honoured in the *Vedas*" (Satpathy 2006:140). However, Bhima's religion was just as much about tantric ritual, symbolism, mythology and icons as it was about cognitive introspection. While *Alekha* was a metaphor for "truth" and the way to *Alekha* was to discover the all-powerful, all-pervading, formless and indescribable truth within oneself through rational thought processes, Bhima also engaged with tantric ritual and with the *saguna* tradition, which contemplates a personal god with a form and attributes,

intimate and accessible, full of compassion and mercy, come down to earth to save suffering beings.[26] Bhima's Ultimate Reality, then, was at once dual (made up of a god outside the self) and non-dual (made up of a god within oneself reached through thought and introspection). Further, he was reachable through true devotion that produced spiritual knowledge (*bhakti yoga*) as well as intellectual knowledge arising out of difficult reflection and introspection (*Jnana yoga*).

In the light of all this, Bhima's religious thought seems far from being an articulation of the secular rational, a mode of knowledge it that ual distinguishes between rational states of mythic, magical and ritual being and irrational ones. The seeming lack of this distinction also renders Bhima's thought as full of logical inconsistencies and contradictions. However, a literary analysis of his poetry reveals that he was well aware of these contradictions. Indeed, he highlights them through his mystical *sandhya bhasa*, the *ulti bamsi,* literally the "upside down" language.

He is neither water nor wind.
He is not formless, yet has no form.
He is neither knowledge nor ignorance,
Nor even the conception of the Veda
(Baumer and Beltz 2010:181).

This is an intentionally paradoxical verse. In Nagarjuna Buddhist thought, which Bhima drew on, water signifies cohesion, and wind, expansion. The two are opposites. Similarly, in the verse, *brahman* "has no form" that one can perceive, yet he is not formless. The verse structures itself around pairs of opposites: water/wind, formless/form, and knowledge/ignorance in its description of *brahman*, providing a logical conundrum. The only line that does not have an opposition at its centre is the last. Bhima does not say that *brahman* is the *Veda* and simultaneously not the *Veda*, making the line a strong rejection of the *Veda*s as vehicles towards *brahman*, especially given the oppositions that structure the rest of the verse. The ulti bamsi reappears in another deliberately contradictory verse.

With waves control the water
In the pond without banks.
At the feet of the Formless of Infinite joy
You shall live forever bearing the brilliance of brahman.
The river running upstream is full to the brim
(Baumer and Beltz 2010: 303).

The lines in this verse are full of intentionally logically non-functional images. Farfrom controlling water, as Bhima writes, waves disrupt water. A "pond without banks" cannot be called a pond. Similarly the "formless" cannot have discernible feet because if it does, it must have form. With these paradoxes, Bhima gestures towards a space beyond representation, that of the void that is *brahman*. *Nekha brahman*, after all, stands for the absolute that cannot be defined, seen or described. If one grasps this, one can reach the void and "live forever bearing the brilliance of *brahman*". This is an internal process of meditation, evidenced by the last line. "The river running upstream is full to the brim" is an image frequently used by the natha yogis and the panchasakha, which serves as a metaphor for ufata sadhana, or "upside down practice", the regressive process of spiritual practice that flows against the currents of worldly existence.[27]

Resolving Opposites

However, I argue that Bhima's ulti bamsi posits these logically non-functional, paradoxical images to resolve them, in the process describinga *tapasya* that is a secular practice, one which does make distinctions between rational understandings of the world and the irrational ones he denigrates. Tp this end, Bhima's ulti bamsi depicts a practice of overcoming opposites that posits a secular mode of ritual being in which rational thought and certain ritual practices are one, serving the same ends, and elaborating the same epistemes of rationality. In doing so, he elevates those symbolic and ritualistic practices that are one with his rational thought above those that are not.

When you measure the measureless and eat the inedible,
The company of saints destroys past sins.
If you meditate on the unimaginable brahman day and night,
The body is transformed anew.
If you can see the essence of the unseen,
You can recite the unuttered prayer.
Know the unknowable
And worship the formless.
If you want to cross over
Dive into the practice of nirVeda.
True knowledge and the path of liberation
Are found at the doorstep of the Guru
(Baumer and Beltz 2010 : 304-05).

In these verses, Bhima speaks of knowledge beyond duality that contains an invitation to a practice of overcoming opposites so that their contradictions are dissolved. Further, the verses demonstrate that the process of overcoming opposites relies on the idea that, in some modes of religiosity, rational thought and ritual practice are one. The first verse posits the idea that the practice of "measuring the measureless" and "eating the inedible" will produce the thought or enact the sprititual process in which the "measureless", or Nekha, will become reachable or "measurable", a process that will destroy "past sins". Similarly, meditations on the "unimaginable Brahmin" will result in a practice that transforms the body. The final verse consolidates these ideas by suggesting that "the practice of *nirveda*", a practice which denotes a bodily detachment from worldly objects, will produce thought, or the "true knowledge", that leads to the "path of liberation".

The ulti bamsi and the contradictions it encapsulates contain the seeds of its own resolution by suggesting the redefining of some modes of religious practice, such as the symbolic ritual of tantra, as being continuous with and inseparable from thought. While western anthropology would categorise these practices as modes of symbolic " ritual", Catherine Bell (1992) proposes that so-called ritual' activities be removed from their isolated position as special, paradigmatic acts and be seen as culturally strategic ways of acting. She argues that seeing ritual activities

as actions separate from thought, as people doing ritual and necessarily thinking something else, is logically nonfunctional. Instead, ritual is a mode of practice and thus continuous with other modes of behavior within everyday life, including thought. Pierre Bourdieu suggests something similar when he writes that social agents operate according to an implicit practical logic and bodily dispositions, or "habitus", which create meaning in the doing. One learns to think a certain way through bodily practice; the bodily practice produces the thought (Bourdieu 1990 : 54). Bhima's creative transformation of language through the mystical ulti bamsi ends up transcending all opposites in the same way that the devotee's mind has to overcome the duality of *maya* to achieve salvation, making the point that rational thought and ritual practice can be one. Ultimately Bhima's cognitive introspection can be seen as a product of his practical *sadhana* rather than his *sadhana* being an out of place footnote to his rational pursuit of moksa in the way it was for Vivekananda.[26]

If we understand Bhima's symbolic and mythological path to the divine through the body as producing his rational cognitive introspection, we can also explain some of his supposed logical inconsistencies. For instance, he registers his hatred for the womb-born gross body, or *Sthula sharira,* but simultaneously also reveals a seemingly unselfconscious affectionate concern for the well-being of the material body. The idea that the body will not be afflicted by a process of decay if one takes refuge in Mahima dharma is reiterated throughout the text [29] However, if one sees Bhima's descriptions of the body as related to different stages towards achieving moksa, they no longer seem contradictory. Instead the paradoxes describe how the physical process of the body becoming beautiful enacts and produces the spiritual process of drawing the self closer to god, and *vice versa.*

May this body of mine shine like a mirror.
May it dazzle like the lightning.
May the formless brahman remain kind to me.
May this form of mine glow like burnished copper.
May this form of mine sparkle like gold;
may it shine like the luminous sun;

May I remain firm, in my devotion to
the revered Guru through the ages
(Satpathy 2006: 52).

Bhima emphasizes the direct link between the physical process of bodily transformation and the spiritual progress towards *moksa* through a play on the word "firm". Since the preceding line has been about the beautification of the body, "firm" is clearly a reference to a firm, youthful body. Beltz therefore points out that the chanting of these verses was part of a ritual performance meant to heal the chanter; the thoughts evoked by the verse enacted the bodily practice of healing to the extent that Bhima was credited with healing powers (2004: 169). However the line that follows, "*in my devotion to the revered Guru*" makes it apparent that Bhima also means "firm" in devotion, or firm in his beliefs. The subtle body (*suksma sharira*) brings about the enlightened state of *moksa* and *vice versa*; Bhima's engagement with the symbolism of the body gives birth to an enlightened state of cognition that leads to *moksa*. The coexistence of the sthula sharira and the suksma sharira are not logically inconsistent and therefore, not irrational; they are simply different steps on the way to *moksa*.

Giving Form to the Formless

Another seeming logical inconsistency in Bhima's thought is the coexistence of the *nirguna* (without form) and *saguna* (with form) traditions of *bhakti*. The divine is simultaneously formless, reachable only through cognitive introspection, and a personal god incarnated in the form of mythological deities. Thus his reality is at once dual, made up of a god outside the self, and non-dual, made up of a god within oneself reached through thought and introspection. Indeed, Bhima often frames the tantric union of *prakriti* (female) with *purusha* (male) through the mythological union of two deities, in one verse, *Radha* (here Prakriti) and *Krishna* (here *brahman* or *purusha*). "*Your union with Prakriti/ Created the world./From being nameless/You acquired a name;/ From being formlesslyou took up a form/Fondly, people call you Krishna —ihe one who dances beneath the kadamba tree*".[39]

However, these logical inconsistencies are resolved through Bhima's understanding that once he has achieved the spiritual goal of reaching *moksa*, he will achieve the physical goal of becoming an embodiment of the deity; he will give form to the formless. One contemplates the formless *brahman* till one sees oneself merging with the divine, embodying the form of the formless. Bhima writes, "Gurudev, my Lord is the *Nirguna Purusa*. I am the one who is *saguna*. May the Lord show me the path as I enter the woods." The "woods" represent the deep, dark, thorny path involved in achieving the merging of the *saguna* with the *nirguna*. When achieved, however, the resulting union of the disciple with the divine is so natural and complete that the formless divine merges with the form of the disciple.

You will only understand the mystery of the body,
As described in the scriptures, when you and your Guru are one.
As milk and water are perfectly mixed,

More so must you unite your minds.
Between who is Guru and who is disciple,
There is no difference at all.
The Lord and his devotee have but one body,
They eat their meals together
(Baumer and Beltz 2010:179).

The verses highlight the absolute inseparability of the *guru*, who is the embodiment of the divine, and the *shisya*, or devotee, after enlightenment has been achieved. There is "no difference", they are of "one body", and the form contains both disciple and guru so completely that when one carries out a bodily function of eating or drinking, the other does too. It is no longer the gross body sitting down to eat but the divine; once again, a spiritual practice results in a physical one. The seeming logical contradictions of the ulti bamsi signal their own resolution by pointing towards the continuity of modes of symbolic practice, such as tantric rituals and bhakti yoga, with the spritiutal, introspective process of drawing the self closer to god. In the process, the "whole rationality" also emphasises those rituals that produce the thought processes and *tapasya* that leads to moksa, demonstrating that

Bhima does distinguish between the "infinite pilgrimages and rituals/ that lead up to the Lord" and those that will enable the devotee to reach spiritual enlightenment.• Bhima's intentional twilight language enacts a secularism that comes from within his religious practice itself by describing a secular state of mind that distinguished between myth and ritual that was rational, and that which was not.

A Universalist Idea of Rationality

Bhima's poetry, in articulating a rationality of radical social equality and a theory of secular rationalism in colonial India, lays the foundations for an indigenous comparative modernity. His aesthetic verse encourages one to see that universalism does.not have to mean that the exact same idea, rationality, for instance, gets instantiated in the same ways in all contexts. A universalist idea of rationality would recognise that other cultures have forms of thought which are just as rational as western forms of thought, even if they are not scientific. A general idea of rationality, this kind of universalism would argue, gets challenged and instantiated universally, albeit in different manifestations. It thus implicitly affirms that other epistemic frameworks, including those that emerge from marginalised cultural and religious spheres, are just as valuable as those imposed from above, such as Vivekananda's emulation of Enlightenment scientific rationality.

In some South Asian contexts, secular rationality arose from within religion itself and in the process challenged many of the binaries set up by the categories "modern" and "premodern". Reading how Bhima articulates an indigenous rationality through the aesthetic form of his poetry enables us to decolonise indigenous thinkers, and give them back their ability to articulate their own identities. Further, their enacting of such reason is emancipatory because it encompasses a diverse set of theoretical practices emerging from, and responding to, colonial legacies while exposing the abuses of power inherent in them. The material they provide, if read as not being completely subsumed by the logic of colonising Enlightenment Rationality as Vivekananda's was, enables us to change the terms of the conversation about modernity. It enables us to see a vast array of local narratives from all corners of

the world conflicting, intersecting or adding to one another, all contributing to the modernity we live in today. More importantly though, because different kinds of thinking are able to coexist with European thought rather than be dominated and humiliated by it, we are left with a way of thinking that renders all it uses, including that from Europe, universally marginal, fragmentary and unachieved and turns modernity into a universal legacy. It is a way of thinking that tells it like it is.

Notes :

1. Colonial presuppositions about the role of sacred texts in "religion" predisposed Orientalists to focus on such texts as the essential foundation for understanding the Hindu people, resulting in the literate brahmins, for whom religious texts like the *Veda*s and *Shastras* were central, becoming representative of the Hindu religion and enjoying elevated social, economic and political status (King 1999 : 101-02).

2. The colonial law-keepers underscored the irrationality of the Mahima Dharmis by defining them as lunatics and fanatics. The *Utkala Deepika*, an Oriya newspaper patronised by the upper classes, stressed the lowly origin and filthy habits of the attackers. (Banerjee-Dube,2007:51)

3. The term "*adivasi*" was coined in the 1903s by the British to refer to the original inhabitants of a given region and also carries the connotation of past autonomy disrupted by the British. However, recent scholarship indicates that there is no clear evidence of an autonomous *adivasi* society; tribal leaders often achieved the higher status identification of the Hindu RajputKshatriyas by inviting brahmins to settle in their domain, perform ritual services and "discover" genealogical validation for their demand for *kshatriya* status. Thus, it is important not to conflate tribal social status with that of the lower castes (despite the co-opting of Bhima Bhoi by the untouchable Ganda-Panas as a symbol of Strength), even as we recognise the particular forms of poverty and discrimination tribals may have faced (Sinha 1959, 1962; Singh 1985).

4. In truth, Bhima's involvement in this incident is questionable. The Sambalpur District Gazettier only linked him to the events decades later in 1904 because the instigators marched to Puri from Sambalpur, which is where Bhima emerged as the main leader of the faith after Mahima Swami's death (Bannerjee-Dube 2007:53;2001:149-77).

5. Mahima Dharma consists of two monastic orders from different sections of society. The unorthodox *kaupinadharis* in western Orissa are mostly from marginalised castes and the *bakkaladharis* in Joranda, with their highly organised, regulated monastery, are from rich farming castes. For an account of the conflicts between the two, see Beltz (2006:86-93).

6. *Alekh* suggests that the absolute that is *brahman* cannot be represented, defined, seen or written about. *Alekha* comes from the Sanskrit root *lekh* or *likh*, which means "to write". *Alekh* means that which is "unwritten", an implicit challenge to the educated *brahmin* religious authorities and the colonial institutionalization of their written texts.

7. Bhima was very much influenced by *tantric* cosmology that suggested all the elements of the universe, including the ancient *yogis* and places of pilgrimage, exist in one's own body. In *tantric sadhana* the body is a link between outer and inner; one can discover the divinity within oneself by using the body as a container of the divinity without. Bhima therefore, instructs the devotee to "locate within your body the holy pilgrimages of the outside world. None so foolish as a *yogi* who wanders from place to place on the earth." The way to "*journey into your body and create therein the vast universe*" is to "*perform the rites of yoga*". There the yogi will find that "*the slave of the Lord contains within all nine continents, and the infinite universe*". See Baumer in Bannerjee-Dube and Beltz (2008).

8. A *siddha* in *sanskrit* means one who has attained spiritual enlightenment. The *sanskrit* word *natha* denotes the path towards enlightenment and the word itself is a synonym

for *brahman*. The *Nath tradition*, a sub-sect of the *siddha tradition*, was founded by *Matsyendranath*, a simple fisherman, in the eighth century, and further developed by *Gorakshanath*. These two individuals are revered in *Nagarjuna Buddhism* for perfected spiritual attainment. The *natha sampradaya* does not recognise caste barriers, and was adopted by outcasts and kings alike. The language of the *Nath yogis* is the *sandhya bhasa* which influenced *panchasakha* literature. See note [11].

9. *Kundalini shakti*, Sanskrit for "serpent power", is energy thought to reside within the sleeping body like a coiled serpent in the root *chakra* (the centre of subtle energy) at the base of the spine, and is aroused through spiritual discipline to bring about enlightenment. In *Tantra Yoga*, *kundalini* is an aspect of *Shakti*, the divine female energy and consort of Shiva.

10. Bhima's Oriya text is very popular but there are only three accurate translations in English. I use the complete and scholarly 2010 translation by Johannes Beltz and Bettina Baumer, long-time scholars of Mahima Dharma, and supplement it with Siddharth Satpathy's (2006) translation of *Stuti Chintamani*. For other *bhajans* not in the above translations, I use Sitakant Mahapatra's (1983) translations.

11. The first known instance of the *sandhya bhasa* is found in the 8th-12th century *Vajrayana Buddhist caryagiti*, or "songs of realisation", from the *tantric* folk tradition in eastern India. The language exemplifies some of the earliest instances of the Assamese, Oriya, Maithili and Bengali languages. The writers of the *Charyapada* were the Buddhist *Mahasiddhas* or *Siddhacharyas* of the various regions of Assam, Bengal, Orissa and Bihar (see note 8). The *sandhy bhasa* literally means the "twilight language" in sanskrit, or *alo-andhari* (half expressed and half concealed). However, later evidence from a number of Buddhist texts suggests that it was called the "intentional language", or the *sandha bhasha* in Sanskrit (Mukherjee 1981:55).

12. Indian caste feudalism was strategically consolidated through an alliance of *brahman*ism and colonial state power, all for their own benefit (Dirks 2001; Omvedt 1994).

13. This is very different from attempts to "provincialise Europe" by scholars such as Dipesh Chakrabarty who analyse how European Enlightenment ideas were appropriated in India to produce a modernity that was just as Indian as European. As Chakrabarty writes, "*Provincialising Europe is a project of globalising European thought by exploring how it may be renewed both for and from the margins*" (Chakrabarty 2000: back cover).

14. Orientalist historiography, such as James Mill's (1840) History of British India, often characterised India as premodern, with Indian history culminating in the "liberating" arrival of the British. This temporality was buttressed by the production of numerous studies that pointedly excluded any intellectual, rational contributions from the non-west. The result was a sharp distinction between modem/philosophy/rational/the west and pre-modern/ mysticism/ irrational/the non-west. Vivekananda and other nationalists set out to challenge this binary when they asserted the inherent rational monism that was supposedly central to Hinduism but did so through the Judaeo-Christian frameworks they thought they were resisting, glorifying the *Veda*s and Shastras, and denigrating rituals, idol worship and mythology.

15. This paper follows the example of other efforts in this vein such as Satya Mohanty's literary reading of the Oriya Lakshmi Purana for a theorisation of a precolonial modernity containing both a feminist message and a radical message of caste equality (Mohanty 2008) and Rao and Shulman's readings of south Indian folk epics, courtly poetry, and prose narratives to argue for the existence of historical narratives in precolonial India (2003).

16. Vivekananda often notes science's supposed ability to understand individual experiences through larger ideas about the world. "*The scientist does not tell you to believe in*

anything, but he has certain results which come from his own experiences, and, when he asks us to believe in his conclusion, he appeals to some universal experience of humanity" (Swami Vivekananda 1964).

17. Although the Ramakrishna movement was originally a lower middle class one, Vivekananda turned it into an all-India success through the financial support of the upper caste Hindu landed aristocracy; his first trip to the US was financed by the Maharajas of Khetri, Ramnad and Mysore (Dhar 1977).

18. On a related note, Joya Chatterjee argues that Bengali communal identity was constructed largley by the upper caste Hindu class that came into existence as a landed aristocracy favoured by the colonial powers. Further, this identity was predicated on dangerous anti-Muslim sentiment (Chatterjee 2002).

19. Ashis Nandy writes that Vivekananda associated the west with "*power and hegemony, and with a superior civilisation*", thus attempting to Christianise Hinduism by turning it "*into an organised religion with an organised priesthood, church and missionaries*" (Nandy 1988 : 24). It is not surprising that the larger part of Vivekananda's active and productive life coincided with his residence in the west (Sen 2006:ix).

20. Scholars such as Walter Neevel have pointed out that Ramakrishna was sanitised into a benign, saintly figure to renew and "authenticate" the Hindu religious tradition for a western educated Indian middle class. The saint was also depicted as an *advaitin*, wholly consistent with Vivekananda's Hinduism (1976: 53-97). Partha Chatterjee and Sumit Sarkar argue that the *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* by Ramakrishna devotee Mahendranath Gupta is more revealing of the "fears and anxieties" of the urban middle class who appropriated Ramakrishna than of the man himself (Chatterjee and Pandey 1993: Sarkar 1997: 282-358).

21. Bhima had frequent conflict with the local ruling elite. Around 1862, the Kshatriya ruler of Rairakhol imprisoned

him; around 1891, the king of Sonepur, Niladhar Singh Deo, accused him of immoral practices and challenged him to prove his purity through an *agnipariksha* (a trial by fire). The king's death before the event could take place confirmed Bhima's sainthood for many (Satpathy 2006:19-20).

22. Bhima's physical blindness can also be read as a metaphor for an enlightened inward gaze (Beltz 2003:237-38).

23. Mahima Dharmi ascetics did not wish to live in total detachment from the material world, wanting to be fed and clothed by local patrons who valued their spiritual message (Guzy 2003).

24. Satya Mohanty makes a similar point in his analysis of the Oriya *Lakshmi Purana*. He argues that the goddess Lakshmi has an egalitarian vision in which the worth of an individual is determined by the individual's action, duty and work rather than static caste hierarchies (2008:5). This idea is also expounded in the *Mahabharata*, translated by Sarala Das into Oriya centuries before Bhima was writing. The *Mahabharata* revolves around the question of who deserves the throne of Hastinapur, asking whether one earns one's lot based on one's actions or because of their place in the kinship, social or religious hierarchy.

25. In making this argument I implicitly rely on the idea that religion, secularism as well as the binary created between them and us are discursive constructs. As King and Asad among others have shown, colonial epistemology categorised religion, deciding what was to fit into it, resulting in a considerably altered "Hinduism" and Buddhism. When I argue that particular forms of religious and secular subjectivity are universals both in the west and the non-west, I am not referring to specific colonial and postcolonial religions, but validating the human characteristics of thinking and living in myth, magic and the sacred, as well as iri secular modes.

26. *Tantra* celebrates sexual experience by recognizing the deities *Shiva* and *Shakti*, or *purusha* and *prakriti*, soul and body, as the *lingam* and *yoni*, the masculine and feminine

energies which create the universe in their sexual union, providing a dharmic path to *moksa*.

27. Acyutananda Das, one of the *panchasakha* poets, uses a similar image in his *Brahma-Sankuali*. "*Who is an embodied siddha, who has not gone against the current ? Moving in the upstream direction the lake of mind is full*" (Baurner and Reitz 2010: 303).

28. This is also clear, for instance, in Bhima's worship of Krishna through seeing himself as Radha reborn (Beltz and Mishra 2008). In this *bhakti tradition*, romantic love between human beings in the material world is seen as merely a diminished, illusionary reflection of the soul's original, ecstatic spiritual love for Krishna, an incarnation of *Brahman*. Thus the practice of romantic love enacts and therefore produces the spiritual union with *brahman* that yields moksa.

29. The unenlightened body is often spoken of in the Sankhya terminology of *sthula* (gross) but Bhima also refers to the *suksma sharira* (subtle body). Only the gross body "dies"; the subtle body survives as the product of the union of the guru or *brahman* with the shisya, or disciple, in moksa, Bhima writes, "*Just as flesh covers bones, so do, Guru and shisya envelope each other in the ocean of wisdom. Just as blood flows through flesh all over the body, so is the relation/ between guru and shisya/ How can one separate the two*?" The subtle-body here functions as a tantric vehicle towards moksa, becoming the metaphor for the union of the guru and disciple.

30. Krishna is supposed to have conducted his "dance" or love play in the *Kadamba* tree's hospitable shade. The "*rasa lila*" or "the dance of divine love", is considered one of the highest of Krishna's pastimes because it results in the creation of the universe. Thus while Bhima's cognitive thought processes reject rituals and idols in favour of finding *brahman* within oneself, he also acknowledges the existence of deities and idols through his *tantric* celebration of Krishna as an incarnation of *brahman*.

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Bhima Bhoi and Achyutananda

Anjali Mahapatra

The saint-poets like Bhima Bhoi and Panchasakhā appeared at a time when religion was infected with sectarianism, dogmatism, rigid ceremonial practices and religious ideas became lifeless and static. The mission of saint-poets was to enlighten spirituality in the inert man. They opened the door of spiritual *sādhanā* for all irrespective of caste and creed. Voluminous literature in vernacular language was written by them for understanding of the common man which was more philosophical than mere literary acumen. Their writings depicted the metaphysics of *śūnyapurusa* and *sādhanā* of *jñāna-misrā bhakti* and humanistic values treating all beung equal by refuting caste system and *brāhminism*. We shall discuss the spiritual vision and practical means to attain perfection of Bhima Bhoi and Panchasakhā especially Achyutananda Dasa. Panchasakhā refers to five great saints that include Jagannath Dasa, Balarama Dasa, Achyutananda Dasa, Yasovanta Dasa and Sisu Ananata. All of them were initiated by Sri Chaitanya who was the propounder of Goudiya Vaiṣṇavism spreading the message of *Suddhabhakti* and *saguṇa* form of the Lord. Inspite of the influence of Goudiya Vaiṣṇavism Panchasakhā would not forget the basic tenets of their metaphysics i.e., *śūnyatā* and their conception of *jñāna-bhakti*.

The philosophy of Achyutananda is seen in his *Śūnya Saṁhitā, Aṇākāra Saṁhitā, Chayaliṣa Patala, Gurubhaktigitā, Brahma Sānkuli, Kaibartta Gitā, Kaliyuga Gitā* and many other books.

There is a striking similarity between Mahimā Dharma and Achyutananda. The founder of Mahimā Dharma was Mahimā Swāmi and Bhima Bhoi was his disciple. Thorugh his blessings he asked Bhima Bhoi to write the essential features of Mahimā Dharma in simple language so that it can reach the common people. His works like *Stuti Chintāmaṇi, Brahma Nirupaṇa Gitā, śrutinisedha Gitā, Nirveda Sādhanā, Astakabihari Gitā* and more than two 100 bhajans reflect his philosophical views on *śūnyapuruṣa, piṇḍa brahmāṇḍa identity, Niṣkāma jñāna,*

bhakti and *karma*. His verses though philosophical in core are written in such a simple and lucid manner that anyone can understand it.

Nature of reality

The three concepts śūnya, Mahimā and Alekha are found in philosophy of Bhima Bhoi and Achyutananda in explaining the nature of reality. The śūnya is beyond intellectual categorisation, it should not be understood as void or nothingness. It is not a theoretical concept but a concrete entity. Ultimate reality i.e śūnya is all-pervading,ultimate agent and regulator of all laws of the universe. He is very compassionate and present in all beings and creator of *māyā* though he knows the tricks of *māyā*. Achyutananda says,

śūnyapuruṣa udāsare rahe,
śūnyapuruṣa sarva māyā bhyaye
śūnyapuruṣa dayālu atai,
śūnyapuruṣa sarva ghate rahi
śūnyapuruṣa kare nataghata
śūnyapuruṣa jāṇe chhandakuta.[1]

Explaining the nature of *śūnya puruṣa* is very difficult as non-dual reality cannot be predicated as he is indeterminate. Any attempt for characterization will lead to ignorance. The following lines of Achyutananda are very illuminating regarding *śūnyapuruṣa.*[2]

Most devout persons and even gods fail to know him. How can they? for he is nothing. He is just himself . If at all we search a parallel, then he himself is his own parallel,only option for wise persons is to describe him as śūnyapuruṣa.

In a similar tone Bhima Bhoi says that *śūnyapuruṣa* is Alekha which cannot be described, and his valuable presence is priceless in all beings.Bhima Bhoi says,

alekha puruṣa sehu, lekhāre na base sehu
asruti amūrti go, nāhin rūpakānti
mahaśūnya śūnyadehi nisbdare chhanti rahi
chhapan koti jivara sampatti go.[3]

Though he is *mahāśūnya*, he is *pūrnabrahma* as he is self-complete.

mahāśūnya pūrnabrahma kartāpuruṣa,
rūparekha barna chinha na thilā drusa.[4]

The *śūnya* though *nirguṇa* expresses itself in infinite ways. The infinite of śūnya is not exhausted by its infinite expressions..

mahāśūnya śūnya je nirguṇa sarira
ekakṣara na base aṇākṣara.[5]
akhandita brahmase gotā hoiachhi,
kichhi uṇā nāhin pūrna rahiachhi.[6]

The transcendence of *śūnya* is not inconsistent with its immanence in all manifestations or particulars, therefore it is not possible to comprehend it in its *nirguṇa* state.

brahma upare brahma śūnya rahichi marma
kehi na jāṇe tānka nija nāmaku.[7]

The ultimate reality is also used with the terms Mahimā and Alekha. Alekha means the ultimate reality cannot be described. Mahimā signifies the the denotative aspect.

The reality is *avyakta*, so none with poetic genius can describe Alekha as the infinite of Alekha eludes the scope of language.

avyakta nisabda nahin veda lesa,
kabi krute barnibāku na sphure sāhās.[8]
se rupaku barnibāku bahut kathina,
akṣara na base jehu na sphure bachana.[9]

As ultimate reality cannot be described therefore the wise persons had no option but to call him as Alekha.

chariyuge kabi lekhi na pārile,
alekha bolina teṇu nāma dele.[10]

The ultimate reality is called Mahimā which means glory or the highest. Mahimā is both *nirguṇa* and *saguṇa*. *Nirguṇa* is present in *saguṇa*. Bhima Bhoi says,

nirguṇa brahmati guṇa bhitare thāi ..[11]

In *sādhanā, saguṇa* is the step to reach the *nirguṇa*. The aspirant must move from *sākāra* to *nirākāra*, *saguṇa* to *nirguṇa* and from *rūpa* to *arūpa*. *Suguṇa* and *nirguṇa* are complementary to each other. Explaining this mode of *sādhanā* Achyutananda gives the following example of sea where water from the sea ascends to sky as clouds and through rain merges in the sea again..

sabu jala jāka samudrare thula,
samudra jāi ākāsah re mela.
ākāse thāi barsa karai,
se sakala puṇi samudrare jāi.
rūpa jai arūpare misiba,
samatā rūpe sabu pāiba. [12]

In *Śūnya Saṁhitā* Achyutananda brings harmony between path of *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa bhakti*. He says,

suṇa āhe gopasuta bhagatira kathā,
saguṇa nirguṇa dui jebaṇa vyavasthā..
dui je deṇāre pakhi udikari jāi,
dui je chakṣure sehi saṁsāre khelai. [13]

Similarly Bhima Bhoi says we should see *arūpa* through *rūpa* and *adeha* through the *deha* or body.

rūpa prāye disuchhi sākhyāte arūpa,
deha prāye disuchhi adeha svarūp. [14]

Mahimā is present in all the three worlds roaming as none is greater than it. If mahimā is pleased,then no suffering or disease can affect the devoted aspirant.

mahimā prasanna hele ki kariba roga,
e tini brahmāṇḍe nische kariba se bhoga. [15]

Bhima Bhoi says that everyone talks of mahimā but none knows its glory. It is not present in any particular place but is all-pervading. He shows himself graciously to his *ātmajñāni bhakta*.

mahimā bolibā kathā samaste jāṇanti,
nija mahimāra kathā kehi na jāṇanti.
kehuni thāre nāhi sabuthāre thānti,
atmajñāniku se drusya hoithānti. [16]

An echo of Bhima Bhoi can be seen in the following lines of Achyutananda,

Those who take resort to mahimā have no fear of danger;this i have directly heard from the Lord.[17]

So we find the mention of the terms alekha and mahimā in Chaitanya Dāsa and Achyutananda. Achyutananda says that without knowing the significance of alekha and mahimā ,it is not possible to tread the path of *nirguṇa sādhanā*. he says,

alekha darshana nischinta,
ante alekha garbhe stihta.
nānā svarūpa barnāchāra,
mahimā nigame gochara.. [18]

Piṇḍa-brahmāṇḍa tattva :

Piṇḍa generally means body. If we can purify the body ,the door for *sādhanā* shall be opened. The ultimate reality has not the abode in śūnya alone, it is present in every being including our body. Without searching for aṇākāra śūnya,the aspirant must search for it in the body. Mediaeval saints like Kabir, Nanak, Dādu, Rajjab tried to propagate a religion that is people-oriented, so they conceived of *piṇḍa-brahmāṇḍa* doctrine. Achyutananda specifically explains this by saying that what we see in *brahmāṇḍa* is present in *piṇḍa*. The ultimate reality is manifested in *piṇḍa* as well as different forms in *brahmāṇḍa*.

jāhā dekhuchu e brahmāṇḍe,
samasta achhi e piṇḍe
brahmāṇḍe jetiki bhiāṇa,
piṇḍara achhai semāna. [19]

deha madhyare to prakāṣi achhi
ātmāku jebe pāribu bāchhi.
śūnya thula śūnya bhāngiṇa nā nā
khandi khandi kari gahaṇā banā,
sabu bhāngi dele ekatva hoi
pūrna brahmamayee esana kahi. [20]

Achyutananda says that one can realise Brahman when one overcomes the illusion or *māyā* which binds you by its sport and penetrates the real nature of *piṇḍa* or body.

māyā chhadei tu kāyāku bheda,
tebe tu pāibu anādi chhanda,
chhanda kariṇa to dehare achhi,
mukha maṇḍale birāji disuchhi.[21]

Piṇḍa brahmāṇḍa tattva is accepted by both Achyutananda and Bhima Bhoi. *Paramabrahma* is one and second to none. There is no place in the universe where *parambrahma* is absent. So he is present in the heart of our body. Achyutananda says that ultimate reality is just like the parrot that is present in our body. If we donot engage ourselves in recognising the *brahman* like parrot, it shall fly away and we shall miss the most valuable asset.

tohar dehare achhai suā
na jagile dine māriba diān.[22]

It is through yoga *sādhanā*, we should cleanse our body and mind,so that we shall be eligible for experiencing the reality within us. By identifying it through *ātmajñāna* we can achieve *brahmajñāna*.

brahmajñāna ātmajñāna nuhai e dūra,
gupata hoi rahichi mandire tohara.[23]

Therefore Achyutananda says by giving up *māyā* and ego one should understand the intrinsic nature of our body so that through self-knowledge we can attain *sadjñāna* or spiritual knowledge.

By imagining *piṇḍa* and *brahmāṇḍa* identity, he says that this identity is there in twenty one spheres of the universe.

emanta prakāre piṇḍa-brahmāṇḍa ekatva,
tini khaṇḍa madhye ekabiṃṣa pura sthita.[24]

In order to clarify this, Achyutananda says that the abode of *avayakta puruṣa* is śūnya,he takes birth as *jiva* and *parama*. The *parama sattā* lives in *jiva* and he plays with *jiva*. Both are one as *parama* moves in *jiva*. In *Tattvabodhini*, he says,

ajñāniku byakta karibu nahin, avyakta puruṣa śūnyare thāi
jiba parama tā beni charaṇa, jiva parama mu hoichhi janma
jibare parama kare vihār; jiva parama ekahi sarira.[25]

Though Achyutananda speaks of *piṇḍa brahmāṇḍa tattva* but the real significance of this doctrine is ignored. He does not speak of the body as the only reality but means to say that there is *brahmāṇḍa* in *piṇḍa*, *adeha* in *deha*, *nirākāra* in *sākāra* or *kāyā* in *akāyā*. So one has to realise that *piṇḍa* is medium through which the ultimate reality is experienced. *Paramasattā* is *pūrna* or complete which pervades in every *ghata*. Our *sādhanā* shall be fruitless if we forget this. This cannot be achieved by mere logic or ratiocination. So he says,

moha tahin dekha tumbhe rahiachha tumbha tahin parā muhin,
tumbhe mo hisābā kariṇa basile vidyāhi antiba nāhin.[26]

Bhima Bhoi also accepts *piṇḍa brahmāṇḍa* doctrine. Human birth is so valuable that mahimā or the ultimate reality is present in the *piṇḍa* or the human body.

mahimā nāmati jehu pratyakṣe manuṣya,
durlabh janmati ate sarvajña puruṣa.[27]

He says that without roaming outside unnecessarily in search of Lord, concentrate on yourself without interruption. You need not spend anything to achieve this. He is nearer to you if you concentrate on your innerself and without controlling your mind he is far away from you.

bāhyare bhrami na mara ātmāre kara bichāra,
mane mane sādhya nirantara he,
bichārile pāse chhanti kaudi na lāge kichhi
no lodile achhanti durare.[28]

Jivātmā is searching for *paramātmā* continuously,but once we recognise it we find that they are one,just as tip of tongue cannot reach the nose but are very nearer,similarly *paramātmā* is nearer to *jivātmā*. By proper *sādhanā* we can feel the Lord within ourselves.

paramaku jiva khojuachhi nirantare,
chinhi pārile se duichhanti ekathāre.

je sanaka jiwahāra agra nāsikāku na jāe,
sehirupe paramati jiva pāse thāe.[29]

Piṇḍa is so important that all kinds of *sādhanā* like *jñāna* and *dhyāna* is possible through our body. If body us destroyed we shall lose our mind and it shall not be possible to achieve Brahman. Pointing out the nature and role of our body Bhima Bhoi says,

ehi ghata thile sabu achhi jñāna dhyāna,
anubhava pathe thua a-manare mana-
e deha chhādile kichhi jñāna āu nāhin
aṇahātu hele brahma pāibuti kāhin.[30]

Theory of creation

Bhima Bhoi explains the theory of creation in details. According to him, though mahimā is uncreated he is the source of all diversities. Though he has no definite abode he pervades in all beings. Bhima Bhoi says that it is *mahimā garbha* which is the origin of all. It is just like a sea in which all beings swim.

je sanaka agādha sindhure thāi meena,
jalara bhitare chahalai ghana ghana.
sehi rupe ate mahā mahimānka garbha,
sāgar parāe kheluchhanti sarvajiba.[31]

Prior to the creation, there was nothing except *śūnya* which is one and due to self-limitation he becomes many.

e māti pathara e jala pabana emāne na thile kehi
śūnya śūnya mahāśūnya thilā andhakāra hoi.[32]

Though alekha is both form and formless,he by his will transforms himself into cruder elements. Chronologically ether is the first transformation, which though crude is subtler than other crude elements. From ether, air is born,and from air, fire is born,from fire water is born and the phenomenal world is born out of water. Day and night,sun and moon,virtue and vice and innumerable living beings are created from mahimā.

asesha brahmāṇḍe jete deha dharichanti
mahimā saktiru utapatti.[33]

The whole creation is manifestation of alekha. It is through the will of mahimā that there is multiplicity which Bhima Bhoi calls as *ichhāvihāra.*

thularūpa dhari ichhāre bihari srujai brahmāṇḍaku [34]

Achyutananda also explains creation theory like Bhima Bhoi who says that everything originates from *śūnya puruṣa.* He says that though Brahman is one,it is because of his will to become many, *prakṛti* was created. From *prakṛti* everything is created. He says,

ādyaru svayaṁ ek brahma thilā,
tahinru prakṛti jāta helā
prakṛtiru sabu hoilā jāta,
ekoisipura hoila khyāta. [35]

Now the question is, why *arūpa* or formless manifests himself as *rūpa* or form and created the world? Compassion of the Lord is the main source of creation. Achyutananda explains the emergence of creation in the following manner.

sekalë sarba śūnyamaya thilā,
se śūnyabrahme samasta luchilā.
srusti sarjanā kalpile jehun,
kāruṇya jala upujilā tahun.
manaru kalyāṇa udaya hoi,
sabda svarūpe se jale padai. [36]

śūnyapurusa by his sheer will creates and destroys the world. What Bhima Bhoi terms as *ichhāvihāra.* Achyutananda calls it as *ichhāsukha.*

ichhāsukhare se saïsare srujai, ichhāre karai laya [37]

So from *aṇākāra, ākāra* is created,one who doesnot understand that everything is created from *aṇākāra* he holds a mistaken views regarding jagat and brahman.

aṇākāraru sarba jata hoila guru kahile bakhāṇa,
aṇākāra bheda na bujhiṇa kheda chitte bahanti durjana. [38]

Sādhanā :

Bhima Bhoi and Achyutananda deal with three modes of *sādhanā* i.e., *karma, jñāna* and *bhakti* as the means for spiritual perfection. Bhima Bhoi accepts the doctrine of *karma* that as you sow,so you reap. He says,

pāpa karithile pāpaku bhunjibe
punya thile punya bhoga ,
chāridwār bujhāmaṇā helabele
jāhā sukrutare thiba. [39]

He says that *karma* leads to bondage and it is not possible to give up *karma* in order to live. For Bhima Bhoi it is possible to do actions and avoid bondage, if one gives up his doership and performs actions with the attitude of *niṣkāma*. So he says,

kāmanāku ichhi sakāma bhajile
nāhin kichhi tahin lābha,
seva bhakti dharma kichhi nuhen tāhā gurupādaku ajogya. [40]

Achyutananda also believes in law of *karma*. He says that *karma* leads to bondage and we can overcome it if we engage ourselves in *akarma*. The term is found in the Gita where *akarma* means *niṣkāmakarma*. If we do our action with love for God and give up our desire for fruit of action,we shall be freed from bondage and there shall be emergence of *nirmala bhakti*. He says,

emanta karma atai bhava bhrama parate tāku na jibu,
akarme nischaya Basudevapriti anubrate majjithibu. [41]

According to Bhima Bhoi, *jñāna* is *ātmopāsanā* which consist in the worship of the Lord as one's own self as Lord is immanent and transcendent principle of the universe. So *bhakti* does not consist in worshipping someone which is different from one's ownself . Knowledge of the Lord is possible through one's own body. He says,

sarirārthe jñānakara tebe paiba gochara,
se alekha aṇākāra achhanti sarva ghatare. [42]

Therefore the aspirant should indulge in uninterrupted meditation on the nature of Brahman so that he can have the knowledge of

the ultimate which leads to liberation.

Ajapāku kara japa, podijiba sarva pāpa [43]

Bhima Bhoi says that *sadjñāna* is not possible through study of the scriptures as this leads to ignorance of Brahman who eludes the grasp of the finite intellect. The limitation of intellectual knowledge can be known when one progresses in the path of knowledge. Bhima Bhoi says that the persons who talk a lot about the ultimate reality are like intoxicated persons who speak inconsistently about *sadjñāna*. He writes,

aneka prakāra kathā sāstrare kahibe,
uparaku pachāribe tuchhātā bolibe.
teṇukari vedaku madyapi boli kahi,
bahut sāstra padhile chittabhrama hoi. [44]

Achyutananda also says that reading of Bhāgavata, Gita is simply the erudition and without knowing *aṇākāra*, all our studies are worthless. He says,

Gita Bhāgavata puraṇā padhibā kahibā chāturi thiba,
tattva aṇākāra nāma brāhmabheda na pāi biartha heba. [45]

For attainment of *sadjñāna* a very rigorous discipline is required. One has not merely to discipline his activity of the body and mind but mind has to remain steady like the sea and should be free from anger and mal-intention with proper intellectual discrimination. Bhima Bhoi says,

sadjñāna boli jāhāku tu kahi,
samudra parāye sthir hoi.
ākāsha paraye bichāra viveka,
kapata na rakhi na karai kopa. [46]

It is necessary to discuss about the relation of *jñāna* and *bhakti*. Bhima Bhoi says these two paths are not separate and independent paths but are interdependent. Without *bhakti*, *jñāna* begins with doubt and ends in it. Devoid of *bhakti*, *jñāna* is mere information. So Bhima Bhoi says *sadjñāna* is not possible without *bhakti*.

binā bhaktire e prāpata nuahe sadjñāna. [47]

Again he says that *sadjñāna* is the valuable gift of the Lord as it is beyond intellectual exposition or intellectual excellence. The aspirant must pray Lord for his grace so that he can have spiritual knowledge.

jñāna ghara kathā asruta abyakta
bina bhaktire ki labhibu.[48]

This view of Bhima Bhoi is also described in the Gitā where it is said *sraddhaml labhate jñānam. Bhakti* initiates and sustains *jñāna*. The Lord is so merciful that he treats all devotees equally. So a true *jñāni* loves everyone as he finds himself in all and all in himself because he sees everything as the manifestation of the Lord.

sakala bhūtare eka,eka ātma prāya dekhe,
samastanku bole mora, muhin atai tumbhara.[49]

We find similar views in philosophy of Achyutananda regarding the relation between *jñāna* and *bhakti*. Achyutananda also makes a distinction between empirical knowledge and spiritual knowledge. He says that empirical knowledge is attained through the mind which is impure. We can't tread the path of spiritual knowledge unless we discipline our mind properly. *Bhakti* and *jñāna* are not opposed to each other. It is through the association of these two paths we can travel in our spiritual journey. One gets knowledge by understanding the intense love or *bhakti*. It is through self-knowledge alone we can arouse *bhakti* in ourselves. Achyutananda says,

by penetrating jñāna one gets bhakti,
and by penetrating bhakti one gets jñāna.[50]

There is no difference between *jñāna sādhanā* and *bhakti sādhanā*. The so called difference is merely superficial and one who does not understand this has to bear all sorrows and sufferings. A proper understanding of *jñāna misrā bhakti* reveals that *jñāna* is given priority over *bhakti*. *Bhakti* as feeling arises from our *jñāna* that reality is non-dual and there is identity between *piṇḍa* and *brahmāṇḍa*. If we do not realize that all our spiritual paths are futile. With this knowledge we surrender all our ego and vanity,

thinking that empirical knowledge is valueless. All our actions are performed as offerings to the Lord. So it is the *jñāna* which finds fruition in *bhakti*.

Like Bhima Bhoi, he says that the perfect devotee is one who finds the Lord within himself as the inner spirit. So Achyuta emphasises to search the Lord within you.

to hrude madhye achhi jñāna,
to tote khoji kara sthāna. [51]

In order to understand *jñāna* and *bhakti* of Bhima Bhoi and Achyutananda we must enquire about the role of guru and *nāma-tattva* in our spiritual *sādhanā*.

Role of Guru:

Guru is the one who helps the disciple to ascend the path of *sādhanā*. He as the boat takes the disciple from the sea of suffering to the highest state and rescues him. Achyutananda says:

e bhava samudra atai,guru tahinki nāba hoi,
uttama dharma nāma kahi,uttam janma dyanti nei. [52]

Guru is just like a lamp, who enlightens the disciple showing the path from darkness to light.

dipa lāgile sarva pāi, saṁsāre guru dipa hoi [53]

Guru is the one who acquaints us with *mahāśūnya* where by we can get everything that is desirable.

Guru chinhānti mahāśūnya,tebe boliba guru dhanya
je sisya chinhe mahaśūnya,sisya bolanti sehi jāṇa. [54]

Achyutananda says that spiritual *sādhanā* is not possible without proper guru.

guru mukhe na bhajile na pāiba bheda
bhramara mudrita puspe pae bada dhana. [55]

Therefore for *sādhanā* selection of perfect guru is very difficult as it is very rare to find him as he knows the proper path for attaining perfection.

uttamaguru pāda sevā , bhagati pada dekhāiba,
eṇu subija guru khoja, agādi dhāne kisa kārya.[56]

All our spiritual activities shall be fruitful if we surrender ourselves at the feet of the guru. So Achyutananda says:

guru thābare mana dele mantra,jantra je mile bhale.[57]

A genuine guru and genuine sisya knows the ultimate reality or *mahāśūnya.*

binā sadguru na kahile,ke chinhi pariba sayale.[58]

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tarak teji gurupāde bhajile paibu jñānara bhuin
nirākāra rūpa śūnyare prakās mānab hitare
sriguru rūpe avatāra, hoichhi e kali jugare.[59]

Manu has explained the inevitable role of guru for *sādhanā*. He is *Siddhidāta*, self-complete and destroyer of sins. Achyutananda explained the glory of guru through whom spiritual knowledge is possible and the disciple gets rid of all worldly suffering.

saṁsāra ye mahāghara yātanā janjāla,
sadguru sevā kale nāsa hue kāla.[60]

If there is *kṛpā* of guru we can be rescued from the dark well of ignorance and the instruction of guru is a guidance for the right path in *sādhanā* for attaining spiritual knowledge.

guru jñāna upadeśa tāku yo boli,
sujñāni nirmala dehi supathena chali.
guru sevāre jñānapāi, andha kūparu uddharai,
guru na sevile Arjun, kāhun pāiba sadjñāna.[61]

Guru is not an ordinary human being he is *aṇākāra* and the aspirant with the highest virtue only get can such a guru.

guruti brahma harihara, guruti swayaṁ nirākāra
emanta gurunkara sevā, je prāṇi se durlabha.[62]

The guru-tradition is very vital in mahimā *sādhanā*. The guru is a *tattvadṛstā* or a spiritual guide who shows the proper path to the disciple for attainment of self-knowledge. Guru is the person who dispels all ignorance and vices of the aspirant. As guru is

ātmajñāni who has realized brahman, it is only by his grace that the aspirant follows the instruction of the guru so that there is scope for his spiritual upliftment. Bhima Bhoi says not to go through the scriptures but search for a *sadguru* who only can show you new horizons in your *sādhanā*.

Bhima Bhoi confesses that though he is ignorant all his creativity is due to the grace of guru.

Sriguru krupāru mora kabipaṇa [63]

Guru for him is not a mere human being. He is alekha and *śūnya* but as a role of guru he is the dearest friend who is a saviour of the disciple. Bhima Bhoi again and again prays for the mercy of the guru with utmost humility to relieve him from all agonies.

bahut avasthā hoilani mote ki karibi guru kuha....
prabhunku na kahi kāhāku kahibi ke bujhiba mora dukha
dukhijan bandhu ata parā tumbhe krupā kari mote rakha. [64]

Bhima Bhoi says that there is no difference between guru and *sisya*. He says,

dehare jesana charma ghodāichhi charmare abori roma,
chāri yuge kebe bhinna bhinna nuhen guru sisya eka nāma.

× × ×

sarira jesana jiva paramati nuhanti se bhinna bhinna,
sei anubhave bujhāmāṇā kara guru sisyankara mana. [65]

Guru and *sisya* are so similar that they live together and eat together. So no discrimination is admissible between them. Bhima Bhoi is explicit in this.

guru sishya duhen ektva atanti
antara maniba nahin [66]

A true guru is one who protects the devotee. None expect guru is capable of doing this ardous task of realisation of the reality. Bhima Bhoi says that after a long time since his birth he could know this,

piṇḍa prāṇa rakhyā kehi na atanti eka gurudeba binu,
medinire thāi sakala jāṇuchhi janmaheli jete dinu. [67]

Nāma tattva:

Achyutananda says that meditation on *nāma* is the best possible path for God-realisation. A real devotee is one who opts for *nāma* as his only action.

nāmare beusa kalati jehu,
bhagata madhye tāṇa ate sehu.[68]

The devotee who engages himself on *nāma*-meditation merges in *parama puruṣa* and is relieved from the worldly-suffering. So he says without wandering here and there, concentrates on *nāma*.

nāmaku chinhile bhakta parame misai,
sola bhelāprāya bhabasindhu pāar hoi.
nāma gale rūpa kehi na chhuinbe āu,
nāmaku na chinhi eṇeteṇe kimpā dhāun.[69]

Achyutananda says that there is no difference between *nāma*(word) and *nāmi* (the object of devotion). The existence of *piṇḍa* is due to *nāma*. There is no relevance of *rūpa* without *nāma*. *Rūpa* is manifestation of *nāma*. First there was *nāma* and then there was *rūpa*. We cannot know *rūpa* without recognising *nāma*.

āaghoon je nāma thilā rūpa ku gadhilā,
rūpara bhitare nāma pūri prakāsilā.
nāmaku chinhile sinā rūpaku jāṇiba,
rūpa na heleṇa nāma kāhin bakhāṇiba.[70]

It is through complete devotion of *nāma* that liberation is possible,

nāmaku bhajile sinā gatimukti pāi,
piṇḍāku kāraṇa nāma binu anya kāhin.[71]

Actually *parambrahma* has neither *rūpa* and *nāma* as both transcend time and space. So he is *arūpa* and *anāma*. He takes the name and form because of his utter grace for the welfare of the devotees.

prakrut mora nāma nāhin arūpa brahma mu bolai ,
arūpa rupabanta hoi nāma svarūpe kheluthāi.[72]

Bhima Bhoi like Achyutananda prescribes *nāma-sādhanā* as the best religious path for the aspirants who are compassionate for all living beings. He says,

nāmare saraṇa jāa jiba pare dayā baha,
e dharmaru sāra āu nāhin na saṁsāre.[73]

The devotee who depends on *nāma* becomes a man of equanimity and is not affected by pleasure and pain and he enjoys the greatest pleasure by meditating on *nāma*. The aspirant says,

dukha sukhaku samāna maṇuthāi kebe nuhae bimukha,
nāme āsrākari dina banchuthāi bole e mo bada sukha.[74]

Bhima Bhoi repeatedly says to meditate on *nāma* by engaging in his professional work but also keeping in mind the gracious *nāma*.

puṇi kahuachhu he puruṣamāne mahimā nāmaku japa,
bādi brutti karma karuthāa pachhe hrude padme nāma rakha.[75]

He says *nāma* of mahimā is a valuable jewel and continuous meditation on *nāma* shall help you to overcome all sorrows and sufferings.

svāmināma alankāra sarvekara nirantara
tebe se janmakastaru hoeiba pāar.[76]
suṇiluki nirākāra mahimānka reeti,
mahimā nāmati jehun jibara mukati..[77]

Social Philosophy :

Equality is the central concept in Mahimā philosophy. In this context, Bhima Bhoi doesn't make any distinction on the basis of caste. Bhima Bhoi confesses that he is an ignorant poet and it is due to compasion of Mahimā he sees all things equally. He was concerned about social oppression of the so called lower class. So Mahimā dharma gives hope to all that there is only one caste. In *Bhajanamālā* 14, he pointed out,

When all became outcastes,
Mahimā svāmi appeared as the mighty Lord
to turn devotees to one caste.

This view follows from his conviction that man is potentially divine, so the question of discrimination doesn't arise. So he tells again and again never to discriminate between a brāhmaṇa and chāndāla and never to bother about *jati* and *gotra*. Bhima Bhoi asks everybody to go around the three worlds and you will find that there is only one caste.

tini brahmāṇḍare lodi āsa tumbhe
ekavarṇa eka jāti...[78]

Bhima Bhoi says that essentially all human beings are one. This is the harmonizing force in the vision of unity that makes one see the Lord in everything. Bhima Bhoi tells all to be compassionate to one and all as all are equal.

alekhapura bhavan tahin nāhin bada sāna
samānare dayā drusti sarva jivare.[79]

Like Bhima Bhoi, Achyutananda argues that the class-division is there to fulfil the need of the society by human being, but all of them are equal, none is superior or inferior as *śūnya puruṣa* is present in all. So Achyutananda is not against class-division but against caste system prelevant in his time. He clearly says.

e mancha mandale puṇi sāna bada hue,
janmajāta bhumire se sāna bada nuhe.[80]

He says to all that go through your knowledge that all belong to the same class, they are different because of their professional efficiency.

samaste je eka jāti jñābale heja,
saṁsāre chalibā pain karichhi bāṇijya.[81]

To substantiate this view against caste-system, he prefers the utterance of the Lord that the scavenger is not different from me. Achyuta says,

hādi boli kari puchhilu Arjuna,
mohar byatirake sehu nuhanti bhinna.[82]

Achyutananda clearly says that all the four castes are created from the *jyoti* of *paramapuruṣa*. Therefore he says that the Lord

showers his grace for all the devotees and makes no distinction between man-made caste system.

brahmaku chinhila loka brahma-vidyā pāi,
bhaktanka nimante prabhu sree mukhe chāhānti kahi.
brāhmaṇaka vidyā ehi eka je nuhai,
bhakataku agochara abā kichhi nāhin. [83]

Those who are real *jñāni* do not accept caste-system. The idea of high and low caste reflects ignorance as Lord is present from insects to Brahman. Achyuta says,

jñāne bisārada je jana, se bheda na karai kadāchite,
lajjā door kari sarvajane Hari kitu Brahman parijante. [84]

So Achyuta says that the devotee should behave like rainfall as water falls on each and every place irrespective of its preference. One can be a true *bhakta* who treats everyone alike as rainfall.

e brahmāṇḍe jebe kari barsaṇa,
samasta sthāne padai hoina samāna.
jala sama jebe karipāru bābu,
aṇarūpa purnabrahma bhakta bolāibu. [85]

Arūpa takes the form of *rūpa* to satisfy the aspirant. When the devotee realizes *arūpa*, then *rūpa* merges in *arūpa*. Therefore *arūpa* cannot be experienced by *brata, japa, tapa* and *mantra* but by intense devotion. So Achyutananda says,

thula nohe śūnya nohe arūpa,
bhakta bhakti bhāve bahanti rūpa.
brata, japa, tapa mantre na pāi
bhāvile nāma anāmaku pāi. [86]

Bhima Bhoi finds that going on pilgrimage in search of Lord is futile as he is present everywhere. One should serve the creation which is manifestation of the Lord and that shall lead us in the path of spiritual progress. He says,

na jāṇi chāridigare pheruachha
tirtha brata boli kari,
jahinre lodiba tahin achhanti brahma
bujhiba jebe bichāri. [87]

Achyutananda also has similar views like Bhima Bhoi with regard to religious rituals,idolatry etc. According to him ignorant persons pray idols of wood, stone and metal without knowing that he is ātman himself. He says that true religion does not consist in *japa*, *tapa* and *mantra*. These practices are not meant to attain *sadjñāna*. He says,

jete e tirtha,brata,tapa
kriyā sambarbh mantra japa,
e sarbe dharma nuhen kichhi
saṁsāra hite veda gachi.[88]

The idol that the devotee worships cannot respond to your prayer. The idol also doesnot take the fruits offered to it,this is meant only to satisfy the devotee's choice for food. They only worship the idol for the sake of their own whimsical attitude. So Achyutananda says,

mruttikā pāsāṇa dhātu nirimāṇa pratimāku thoke,
na karanti pujā bolanti manujā gadhuchhanti kautuke.
e jete devatā na kahanti kathā na karanti kichhi grāsa,
je puje se bhunje janamana ranje pratimā kari subesha.[89]

Bhima Bhoi was critical of idol worship,observing mechanical rituals and going on pilgrimage. Poeple waste their valuable human life by superficial religious activities forgetting that it is through *ātmabhakti* alone immortality can be achieved. So he says,

durlabha janama biartha heuchhi parameswarku na jāṇi
ajñānare nare sabuku pujile prakrutira sukha mani.
apaṇā manare jāhā vichārile sehu karmamāna kale,
bruthā karma kāṇḍa samāste padile nija dharma na jāṇile.[90]

He appeals.people not to go for idol worship as idol is inert and lifeless and asks them to worship him who has given life to you. The idols cannot give you boon as it is made of wood or stone.

So we in our discussion we find that philosophy of Bhima Bhoi finds its culmination in the views of Achyutananda regarding the social, religious and metaphysical views appealing common man to follow the path for self-realisation which is accessible to all of them.

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Bhima Bhoi: A Poet and Preacher of Mahima Dharma

Fanindam Deo

Bhima Bhoi's prayerful poems are revered by the followers Mahima Dharma. Let us focus on the life and compositions of Bhima Bhoi to situate him in proper context. Myth and legends surround Bhima Bhoi's early life. A lot of controversy is there regarding his place of birth. Scholars assign from Paiksara, Bolangir district to Kankanapadā, Jatāsinghā and Redhākhol in Sambalpur district and even Joranda in Denkanal district, as his place of birth. Also, scholars have not yet agreed on the exact year of his birth that is between 1849 to 1869 and his place of birth. There is also a controversy regarding the exact year of death that is 1895 or 1896. But there is no controversy regarding his place of death, i.e., he died at Khalliapali, Subarnapur.

There are many legends regarding his birth and blindness. Whether he was blind is interesting. N. N. Vasu[1], in his work says Bhima Bhoi was blind by birth. Artaballav Mohanty in his introduction to *Stuti Chintāmani*, relying on medieval literature argues that he was undoubtedly blind by birth[2]. B. C. Mazumdar speculates that he lost his eyesight later[3]. N.K.Sahu and M. Mansingh opine that he lost his eyesight due to small pox[4]. Chittaranjan Das[5] basing on oral tradition notes that due to his radical stand on caste system the upper caste people of his village threw him in a well where he lost his eyesight. Amongst the followers of Mahima Dharma also this controversy persists; Biswanath Bābā believes that he was blind by birth whereas Sriyā Devi, the adopted daughter of Bhima Bhoi, strongly claims that he was not (Bighnaraj Patel's interview with Sriya Devi). Kunja Bihari Bābā, a *balkalidhāri* sannyasi, Lata Matha, Joranda, also believes in the latter.(I had an opportunity to stay in Joranda Mahimā Ashram during the *Māgha Melā* of 1994 and interviewed Kunja Bihari Baba on the day *of Māgha Purnimā*).

Interestingly *mālikās* of earlier period predicted the coming of Mahimā Swāmi and Bhima Bhoi as incarnations in the *kali yuga.*

Achutananda [6],16th century poet predicted, "Nitya Rādhā would take male form in *kali yuga* as Bhima Bhoi". Sridhara Das[7] wrote "Radha would take male incarnation at Redhakhol in a *Kandha* family.He would be blind by birth."

These compositions known as *malika* began in the 16th century Odisha and till now are very popular in Odisha. In this literature the composer/ writer uses apocalyptical vision to foresee the end of *kali yuga* and therefore it is conducive to interpolation. So, these compositions need close scrutiny and analysis. In our opinion, uncritical acceptance of these compositions had led to the controversy. Scholars like Bhagirathi Nepak have sought to analyze the internal evidence in Bhima Bhoi's own compositions and opine that Bhoi was not blind[8]. He quotes as follows:

Every day I used to take cattle to the forest. When I was thirsty, I used to drink water from the hill streams. Looking at the sky often I used to doubt whether some food would be in my luck today. (*Stutichintāmani*, 22 Boli,1,2).

To my eyes the fifty-six crores of living being look like strand of straw. (*Stutichintāmaṇi*,26, Boli,16).

Seeing with my own eyes again I forget...

I beseech your grace as I roam around like a blind man.

I am cutting my own tongue and piercing a stick into my own eye.

I woke up immediately and found by my side the Śūnya brahma; I wiped my eyes, looked again and found physically the guru and the disciple. I fell prostrate at their feet they blessed me. (*Nirbada Sādhanā*, Chapter I)

According to Nepak , in the face of such information from his own writings, it would be wrong to assume on the basis of *Mālikas* and other unauthentic sources that Bhima Bhoi was blind. Further, they say that in his autobiographical work *Stutichintāmaṇi* he has so many references of his life, miseries, sufferings, humiliation and other personal references. But nowhere has he mentioned about his blindness. Sitakanta Mahapatra who reviewed life and writings of Bhima Bhoi in *Makers of Indian Literature*

Series, Sahitya Academy, New Delhi writes, " it would be more reasonable to assume that Bhima Bhoi was not blind."[9] But Bhoi's contemporary reports submitted by the Commissioners of Chhattisgarh and Odisha recorded Bhima Bhoi as born-blind but endowed with natural talent of superior order.[10]

Situating Bhima Bhoi

From the hagiographies of Mahimā Swāmi, the founder of Mahimā Dharma, and Bhima Bhoi,a preacher of Mahimā Dharma, we find that both had uncommon birth. One is not born from mother's womb, the latter is found by his foster parent. Mahimā Swāmi was considered *sakara* form of *Alekh param brahman* and Bhoi as reincarnation of Radha. Former's early life is associated with holy places of India and Odisha, a *sadhu* taking care of the needy, diseased and improving the holy place of Kapilas, endowed with very superhuman power. Bhima Bhoi was a kandha cowherd boy, a blind illiterate. God transformed him into a poet and assigned the duty to propagate Mahimā Dharma. Mahimā Swāmi, after twenty-four years of penance became a wandering ascetic and remained so till his death. Bhima Bhoi, an ascetic became a householder, had four wives. He had one son and one daughter. Both of them predicted their death beforehand and sat on the *Samadhi* on the due date. Swāmi built *tungis*, received immense wealth but later he burnt them all. He was not attached to property. He did not recognize any body to inherit. But in case of any crisis among his followers it is believed that he communicated through Śū*nya bā*ṇi. Bhima Bhoi selected one of his wives as his successor. Perhaps, there were attempts to overcome obscure and low origin of the propagators respectively. Hagiography played an important role. Perhaps it helped to overcome their shortcomings. A *Sādhu* and a *kandha*, with little or no access to sacred text and almost a non-entity to formal education, could claim devotional equality if not superiority over the orthodox ruling classes, at least in the eyes of their followers.

Let us now focus on the writings of Bhima Bhoi. Arta Ballav Mohanty edited and published *Stuti Chintāmaṇi* under the aegies of Prachi Samiti in 1931. Later, he published *Brahma Nirupaṇa Gita, Chautis*ā and *Bhajanam*ā*l*ā. In 1955 a collection of Bhima

Bhoi's writings was published by Vidya Dhar Sahu, Dharma Grantha store, Cuttack. Another collection of Bhoi was published in 1960 by the same author and publisher. In 1971-72 and 1992 two elaborate collections of Bhoi were published from Cuttack. I have utilized the new edition (1992) edited by Karuna Kar Sahu published by Dharma Grantha Store, *Bhima Bhoi Granthābali*[11].

His earliest work was *Nirbeda Sādhanā*. The entire text is in a dialogue form, a dialogue between Mahimā Swāmi (Anādi in form of *Abadhuta)* and Govinda Baba (Jagannatha in the form of Govinda); *Guru and shisya*. The latter is putting queries while the *guru* (Anādi) is explaining and teaching. According to Bhoi, *Alekh Param Brahama* and Lord Jagannath of Puri, appeared in his vision as Mahimā Swāmi and Govinda Baba when Bhoi was sixteen years old. In his vision Bhoi saw Mahima Swamy teaching *Nirbeda Sādhanā* to Govinda Baba. In the process Bhoi learned *Nirbeda Sādhanā* and tenets of Mahimā Dharma in revelation.

The story of *Nirbeda Sādhanā* runs as follows:

Bhoi saw in vision Mahimā Swāmi initiating Govinda Baba in which Swāmi gave the later an ochre coloured loin' cloth to wear and a *kumbhi pata* as *ādi bānā*, and asked him to proceed to practice *Nirbeda Sādhanā*,the essence of which is preserved in a village named Balasingha near Boud, the earliest *Siddhapitha* of the guru himself. Govinda Bābā followed the unusually difficult *sādhanā* for twelve years, begging cooked food, *Vikhyā* from village to village without discriminating anybody from anybody else on ground of caste. This way he transgressed the 'Hindu' laws and practices. Hindu God and Goddess became afraid of him and there was a fear if Mahima Dharma succeeded on the earth people would forget the 33 crore *deva devis.* Therefore, they attacked Govind Bābā. The latter in order to seek solution wanted to visit his *guru,* and proceeded to Kapilas Mountain. *Guru* could know the psyche of his *shisya* and appeared before him. He was annoyed because the *shisya,* was afraid of attacks and was proceeding to Kapilas where there is nothing but a stone *Linga. The guru* in order to test the capacity of the *shisya* shield Govinda inside a stone temple and left for Kapilas. The *shisya* sat on a *Yoga Sādhanā*, concentrated on Alekh Param *Brahma*, remembering his

guru's name. Guru came back and took him to the world of bliss. There Govinda put some of his queries. Anādi replied, first there was *Mahāśūnya* or the void, from void emerged letters *Omkāra*, the first sound. From the first sound there emerged images, from first image light came out, from light water, from water *Veda*, *Brahamānda (The Universe), (air)*, *Khyamā* (forbearance), *Dayā*, (benevolence) *shila*,(modesty) and *shānti* (peace) which are the friends and companions of *Sunnya Brahma*.[12]

Anādi could know the suffering of his followers in this *Kali Yuga*. Therefore, to establish *Satya Yuga* and to save the followers of Mahima Dharma, he descended on earth. Anādi said, 'I am working day and night. I have set *anahat dhuni (Ever burning fire)* and am trying to established dharma'. He told Govind Das, 'I am no other than Anādi Puruṣa. The people in this *Kali Yuga* are unable to recognize me and criticize my *dikshyā*'. Govinda asked,'you have come as an a*badhuta* or sannyāsi, advise us the path to be followed in the *Kali Yuga*'. He answered, 'the followers of mahimā should tolerate the criticism and attacks, like mother earth, and concentrate on *Nāma Brahma*. Realization of name is superior to four Vedas. There is no difference between my *bhaktas (followers, sishya)* and me. We work together, and we are like *guru-shisya*. There is no caste bar. If someone is from lower caste and recites my name, I am always with him. I stay in heart and provide *jñāna (knowledge, truth)*. I am a guest and take food at every house. Whoever follow my advice, I serve them; irrespective of ascetic or householder'.

Govinda inquired, 'what would happen in the future, in the *Satya Yuga*?' Anadi answered, 'innumerable *sādhu sant* would emerge in this world, sixty-four *siddhas* and other *sādhus* are already there in human form, both men and women to enjoy the future state to come. All will eat together'. Govinda asked, 'how could all eat together? How is it possible'? Anādi replied, 'My *bhaktas* will blossom with their brightness. The *chhatra* or umbrellas and flags of one lakhs *rajas* will be destroyed and buried on earth. I will be the Emperor, one lakh *chamara*, one lakh umbrella, will be unfolded at my service, one lakh *khanjani*, one lakh *gini*, one

lakh *sankha*, one lakh *mardal*a and *tala* will vibrate at a time.'

Govinda asked,'How can this be possible, when you are roaming like *a vikṣu*? When nobody, not even your *devatās*, are aware of it, how will the common man know'? Anādi replied, 'Listen Govind, all these present rājās will obey my *ajñā* or order. They will construct temples for me and will serve as servants. One-lakh rājās will serve as *sāmanta*. They will grow *jat*ā or matted hair. I will recognize them as my *sāmanta* and will distribute *pata* or cloth, and wealth. They will follow dharma. They will spend their days with *sādhus* and *santhas*. Nobody will be a worshipper of wooden image, they will only worship formless *Alekh brahma* in their heart'.

Language of Protest, Innovation and Expression of Individuality and Separate Identity: Religious ideas have long been the language of protest,innovation and expression of individuality and separate identity[13]. Bhima Bhoi's writing provided vast scope for interpretation in order to legitimize the aspirations of various sections of the population and justify changes in the existing social relationship. In *Nirbeda Sādhanā* Bhoi predicted establishment of Mahimā Empire where all exploiters would become servants and exploited would become masters. This reflects a millenarian ideology in a colonial situation. In the 19th century Jagannāth cult was under the iron grip of *rājā-brāhman* nexus. The *sabara-devt*ā (Jagannāth) had been hijacked by the ruling classes of Odisha from the *ādivāisis* and was used as tool of exercising authority over the latter. *Dinabandhu* (another name of Jagannāth) or the friend of the downtrodden had been brāhmanized as *Badathākur* or the great God beyond the reach of the downtrodden. The downtrodden in general were not even allowed to enter the very temple dedicated to God. This went against the basic principle of universality which the cult of Jagannāth represented. Jagannāth cult in 19th century had come to be identified with those who wielded power and authority. Coincidentally, in 1865-66 there was a great famine in Odisha in which lakhs of people died. A section of the society started thinking that it was due to the *pāpa* or sin committed by the ruling classes.

However, it would be wrong to assume that under such pressure all groups revolted en masse against the exploiter. As a matter of fact, we find that the reaction of each group in Orissa arose out of its own historical context. The meaning people give to an entity or an event arising out of the range of meanings and options available to them at the time of their particular experience of that entity or event prevailed.[14]

When the lower strata of the society was chafing under the emerging system, one kandha poet, Bhima Bhoi, came out with his work (reffered above). He preached that the final deliverer had already appeared in Odisha in the form of Mahimā Swāmi. God Jagannāth of Puri has left his temple and became a disciple of Mahimā Swāmi[15]. He saw the system responsible for the miseries of the low caste people and ādivāsis. Bhoi's composition attracted the ādivāsis, peasants and allied caste groups who felt themselves incompetent to counter their loss of forest resources, land resources and social status by open revolt. It also attracted the ādivāsis who were socially and culturally in the lower levels of *jāti* society, and the untouchables and downtrodden who saw a possibility to enhance self-image and social status. In all these cases membership of Mahimā Dharma embodies an element of protest against the prevailing socio-political-religious order. Within eight years of its existence, it could attract thirty thousand people in Odisha into its fold.

Bhoi ,being a *desia kandh* and a cowherd boy, was familiar with the sweat and pain of toil. In his compositions he expresses his anguish against injustice, poverty, inequality, exploitation and rest hopes that all this will come to end with victory of *mahimā dharma* and subsequent establishment of *Mahimā* empire. According to Bhima Bhoim, Mahimā Swāmi is living and loving Lord who is personally looking after everybody and attending to even to the neglected ones. Therefore, Bhoi asked *mahimā* followers to surrender everything to Mahimā Swāmi instead of rājās. In this, he countered the claim of the rulers and challenged the authority of the temporal kings. He questioned the authority of the rulers to impose restrictions. He

declared that the land and country are the creation of God and the *mahimā* followers roam there by the grace of God, not by the mercy of the temporal rulers[16].

Bhima Bhoi's God, Universe, Kali Yuga, Maya, Man and Woman

So far we have seen that Bhima Bhoi's God is both *nirguṇa* and *saguṇa*. He resides in all human body, irrespective of caste and gender. Evil impact of *kali* has blocked our knowledge to realize Him in our body and foolishly we are searching for Him in temples, pilgrimages, *sāstras*, rituals and *Vedas*, etc. Whoever will realize and follow the *Mahimā* rules will mingle in *mahāśūnya,* irrespective of caste or gender. Due to *Kali Yuga,* man and woman and people of all castes are engaged in *lova, moha, krodha and māyā*. In fact in many of his verses he informs about only two *jātis-* man or woman. Both are well equipped for liberation or hell. But in some of his verses, he equates woman with *māyā.* He warns man to be careful. Sex with woman for carnal pleasure and extra marital sex leads to hell. In this woman becomes the part of *māyā*. He identified six types of women and out of six one is part of *māyā*. He of course identifies six types of man also, *rajaloka, bramhaloka, devaloka, vedaloka, gopaloka and muniloka*. His argument places both man and woman on equal footing on the path of *mukti*. For man's *mukti* he should possess' good qualities like *dayā, kshyamā, sānti, sila* and concentrate on Alekh Param *Brahma*. But for woman, in addition to these good qualities, he prescribes certain additional qualification like serving her husband and his family faithfully. Bhima Bhoi creates better chance for woman's emancipation but under the patriarchal value system.

In Odishan tradition we come across instances of *sādhus* or mystics claiming *yogic power* and the Panchasakha with their *bhakti marga* counterpoising their powers of seeing the Divine or Adi Jagannāth against *Brāhma*nic claim to textual knowledge. Bhima Bhoi is one step forward in this matter. He claims the visual and physical experience of the Divine every day. The nature of *mahimā bhakta* is in itself pure and therefore nothing can pollute him.

Therefore, he claims the creator is amongst the people in *sakāra* form, which is superior to textual knowledge and even *spiritual darshan*. Param *Brahma* is available at the doorstep, along with the guardian deity of Odisha, Jagannāth. They are available for every ordinary sufferer in this world. Perhaps this was to valorize the life of the peasants, artisan and tribals etc. In this we also infer that physically seeing and meeting are held to be superior to hearing and reading. So, having Mahimā Swami physically amidst them and seeing him from a close quarters has been held as the highest spiritual experience. The peasants, artisans and tribals steeped in with oral tradition could claim devotional equality if not superiority over the orthodox ruling classes. The latter had almost monopolized not only property but also the *sāstras* and temples, (which was) considered to be the path of salvation. Meeting and listening from close proximity of Mahimā Swami generated straight, gratifying results like the day to day works of peasants, artisans and tribals. In Bhima Bhoi we see a step forward than that of the *Panchasakhā* of the mediaeval Odisha. Nineteenth century was the prime time for economic exploitation by the *Garjat* rājās and *zamindar*s of Odisha. They imposed taxes on whatever were susceptible totaxation. They constructed rājā uāsa or palaces and temples at the expenses of the common men. To make the ruler's act of taxing the rightful an aura was created around the ruler as divine representative on earth, *rajamahaprabhu*. They needed extra revenue to satisfy their demands of the officials, administrators of the estates. Patronage of tantric *pitha*s and shrines of tribal deities in the outskirts of the new capitals of the rulers were no longer suitable to legitimize the elevated position of the new *Garjat* chiefs. Rajas as kshyatriya kings in the *brahma*nic model needed temples at the capital town of the estates, in front or even inside the palace. This served the religious as well as political purpose. It also had social impact. Communities were assigned various services to perform in these temples. Big temples, may be of the local deity or of Jagannāth with landed property and their daily rituals, in a way, were to legitimize the new status of the Garjat rājās as the divine representative on earth called *rājāmahaprabhu*. Against this we come across

tribal-peasant uprising in 19th century Odisha[17]. It was against *rājā-sarkār-thekedār* nexus. The rebels' main targets were land alienation, new taxation, *thekedars*, and exploiters of forced labors[18]. Therefore, legitimization of their position was crucial for the rulers to counter the rebels. Rulers of Odisha utilized the ideology of *rājāmahaprabhu, thākurraja, pradhān sebaka* based on the principle of loyalty and allegiance. The power of the ruler, obtained through loyalty to a deity, was ideologically designed as a manifestation of deity on earth. The raja was the deputy of the deity on earth as well as the Lord of the land (kingdom), and the subjects subservient to them. Trapping from the Odishan rulers, concept of political authority Bhima Bhoi s in his composition *Nirbeda Sadhānā* counters the claims of these rulers and their associates.

Bhima Bhoi's Prediction: Coming of Mahimā Empire

To Bhima Bhoi's philosophical system, Hinduism, Bhuddhism, Nāthism, Dharma Cult, Kabirpanthi, *Chausathi Jogini* tāntrick concept,Jagannath Cult, *Panchasakhā* concept of *Śūnnyatā*, Chaitanya Das's concept of *brahma nirupaṇā* and *nirguṇa bhakti, ādivāsi* belief, tradition and practices, Islam, Christianity are available. His philosophical system drew upon diverse spiritual tradition of Odisha. As a philosopher-poet and preacher, he transformed them and used freely in his own spiritual composition, which testifies to his visionary prominence. As a thinker and agent of radical social transformation, Bhima Bhoi was far ahead of his times. He placed *Bhakti mārga* above *Karma* and *Gyana mārga* for salvation. He denied the authority of rājā, *brahman*, and their associates. He even rejected the 'Hindu' God and Goddesses, Veda, Purāna on the ground that they were only means and not end in themselves. He was radical in his interpretation and predicted the coming of the *Mahimā Empire.* He further equated it with The *Satya Yuga*. His *mūkti* is open to all, even to the lowest up the low. In his writings there is no concept as lowliness. There are only two *jātis*- men and women. Both are capable of achieving *mūkti*, and both can sink to hell. Bhima Bhoi played an important role in putting the tenets of Mahimā Dhārma into vibrant poetry.

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Agony And Ecstasy: Bhima Bhoi In Santha Tradition

Basanta Kumar Panda

History is full of mystery about Bhima Bhoi. He was a mystic saint poet living during the later part of the nineteenth century in the western part of Odisha. His birth place and blindness are not free from controversy because none of his contemporaries had written anything about him. Except a few comments in '*Utkal Deepika*', nothing was written on his life or literature till Dr B. C. Mazumdar of Calcutta University included some of his poetry and discussed him in *Typical selections from Oriya Literature* in the second decade of twentieth century. Subsequently *Stuti Chintamāṇi*, his *magnum-opus* was published with a critical introduction by Prof. Arta Ballava Mohanty and Bhima Bhoi has been established as the last saint-poet of Odisha. This paper aims to ascertain his position in the tradition of mystics and mediaeval saints of India in the light of the concept of mysticism and to explore the popular philosophy inherent in Bhima Bhoi's literature.

Before ascertaining his position as a saint poet (Santha Kavi) we must know the meaning and nature of a saint and the difference between *Sādhu* and *Santha*. '*Sādhu*' means straight, right and leading to goal (Williams,Monitor Monitor, A Sanskrit- English Dictionary,Motilal Banarasidass, 1986). In *Vedic Brahmanas* the term connotes some one who is well disposed, kind and noble. A good man gained power over *sādhanā*, a religious ascetic medicant, who renounced the worldly life for practice of *sadhana*. But '*Santha*' has a deeper meaning . It is derived from word '*sat*'. *Matsya Purana* gives one explanation:

> " *Brahmanah shrutishabdascha debanam byaktamurtayah*
> *Sampujya brahmanah hetastena santhah prachakshate*"

(Vasu, Srisa Chandra, The Sacred Books of the Hindus, vol. xvii, The Matsya Puranam,1916, AMS Press pp- cv-cvi)

"*Brahmanas* and *Vedas* are the scriptures of God, whose heart combines Brahma with self they are known as *santha.*"

In Aranya Kanda of *Ram Charita Manas* SanthaTulasi Das gives following description:

"Sat bikāra jita anagha akāma,
Achala akinchana suchisukha dhāma,
Amit bodha aniha mita bhogi
Santha sara kavi kobid Yogi"

English synonym of Santha is Saint, a term derived from Latin 'Sanctus' similar to Greek 'Hagias' which means holy. It has been used sixty times in Bible.[1] Lawrence Cunningham in his book *The Meaning of Saints* defined saint as a person acknowledged as holy, virtuous and regarded in Christian faith as being in heaven after death.[2] Six characters of a Saint has been laid down: 1. An exemplary model 2. An extraordinary teacher 3. A wonder worker and source of benevolent power 4. Intercessor 5. A person refusing material attachment or comforts 6. A person possessing of a special relationship with the holy.[3] But it is evident from the ethico-metaphysical fabric of Bhima Bhoi's writings that he was a descendent of mediaeval mystics. In this context it is obvious that the question comes, What is mysticism and who is a mystic? Stages of mystical progress may be indicated on the basis of the well-known scripture in *The Bhagavad Gita* as follows:

"Sarbabhūtasthamātmānam sarbabhutani chātmani l
Ekshate yogayuktātmā sarbatra samadarsanaḥ ll
Yomam pasyati sarbatra sarbam cha mayi pasyati I
Tasyaham na pranṇsyāmi sa cha me na pranṇsyati ll"
(Ch-6/29-30)

The all-pervasiveness of knowledge and self, the sense of equality of life rooted in the self-knowledge, the life of detached and dispassionate, altruistic devotion and service to all creatures, the realisation of the absolute and the transcendental Divine that is immanent in the self and in all existence, sentient and non-sentient, and, finally the consecration of life with all its activity as service to the Divine immanent in all sentient creatures and at the same time identification of a life of profound silence

with the non- dual, undifferentiated, unconditional and peaceful Absolute. The highest adept described in the Gita is one who on the basis of his identity with all sentient creatures and the identity of their happiness with his happiness and of their pain with his pain, serves everybody with compassion *(anukampā)*. Søren Kierkegaard, the founder of existentialism, has given a similar interpretation of christian love as an interest in the true or eternal welfare of all other creatures. In loving 'the man one sees' regardless of merits and demerits, we not merely fulfil the divine command which is the law of our nature truly understood in doing so we also love God in the truest and highest sense through sharing of His love for man. From the Christian standpoint to love men is to love God and to love God is to love men, what you do to men you do to God. *(Kierkegaard, Works of Love)*[4] Mystical contemplation, Eastern or Western demonstrates that the highest mortality is reached, not through repression and asceticism, but through the way of unitive knowledge or communion fused with love, compassion and sympathy that imply positive self-transcendence, power and service. In *The Perennial Philosophy* Aldous Huxley speaks of moral idolatry, that is the worship not of God but of human ethical ideals in which the acquisition of virtue is treated as an end in itself and not as a means --the necessary and indispensable condition of the unitive knowledge of God.[5] The other dimension of the mystics is the philosophy of popular literature. There is an idea in vogue that philosophy is the exclusive business of the learned few and that the common man has no access to it. The hypothetical literature which goes under the name of philosophy sharpens reason and intellect like a razor blade that works through all prepositions. But it does not solve life's problems, nor give peace. On the soil of India side by side with the feats of logic a stream of thought developed and was preached among the masses, to look at the problems of life from a higher altitude rather than using pure reason. There is a mystical popular philosophy side by side with critical scholastic philosophy. Popular philosophy starts with the assumptions that truth which is beauty and joy is a thing for realisation, not for understanding. It is never revealed to reason, it is revealed only when the subject achieves complete identity with the object and

this identity is achieved only by means of emotions that are elemental in man. Hence love succeeds where intellect fails. The philosophical songs of the people epitomised by Buddhist *Therāvādas*, Sufi poets, *Sahajiyas*, Bauls of Bengal and medieval mystics like Santha Kabir, Chandi Das, Sura Das, Hari Das, Rahim, Tukaram and others. As all are marked by a simple and honest spiritual fervour and pragmatic needs of life rather than abstract metaphysical speculation. There is a clear affirmation that the truth is not outside life: the popular philosophers cut the chains of introspective analysis and soar high on the wings of lyrical ecstasy like birds whistling their notes in the wide expanse of the Horizon.[6]

At the end of the classical age, in the post-Sankara period and with the rise of *Nāth-Sampradāya* there arose in the different parts of the country a line of saints and mystics who brought the wisdom of the ancient Rishis and the *Acharyas* to the common people. They adopted the local language and used the medium of song in their mission. They were pilgrims, all the time moving among the people. They came from all classes and strata of the society, which in itself was the outcome of the universality and the basic oneness of man that they proclaimed. They might have risen in diverse schools of religion or philosophy, but all of them emphasized the fundamental truth and the eternal values. With satire and sarcasm and in homely language with similes and symbols they declaimed against hypocrisy and corruption, empty images and rituals and all kinds of falsehood. Their plea was for sincerity of faith and fellowship of beings and integration of the whole man. When the great Hindu Kingdom declined, invasions increased, the ideas and institutions of Dharma and Bhakti were in peril, these minstrels of God always on their feet, kept up the morale of the people, and through the attraction of the form with which they played with freshness and variety on the generation of morality and character and the superiority of special values over mundane pursuits revitalized the devotion and faith, the Bhakti and shraddha of the classes and the masses. In the coming together of cultures confrontation was not the only result, there is also a synthesis which gave rise to saints who bridged the gulf and spoke the same voice of integration.[7] A

series of saints came from different parts of the country through the ages are of three categories. Some are devotional poets, some are pure mystics and some other writers of *The Rāmāyana The Mahābhārata* and *The Bhagavata* writers in the mother tongues. Even some were common in two or three categories. They were men and women, Hindu and Muslim and from different languages. Beginning from the earliest Tirumoolar in 3rd century and 5 from Tamilnadu – the Nayanmaras, Alwars and Andal in 5th to 8th century, 4 from Maharashtra- Jnaneswar, Narasimha Meheta ,Tukaram and Samartha Ramadas in 13th to 16th century, 4 from north India- Santha Kabir, Guru Nanak, Sura das and Hari Das in 14th to 16th century, 3 from eastern India- Vidyapati, Chandidas and Sankardev in 14th to 15th century, 3 of them are women – Andal from Tamilnadu, Lal Ded from Kashmir and Mira from Rajasthan in 14th- 15th century, four Muslims- Rahim, Jayasi, Raskhān and Shah Abdul Latif in 15th to 18th century. They are some of the significant mystics out of innumerable saints born in Indian religious history.[8] These saints and mystics brought home the message of the religion of love for the people, released the soul of the common man from the oppressive burden of sacerdotalism and indicated to the individual that his voice could be heard by God if only it rose from a pure and sincere heart. This religious activities formed the basis for the growth of culture and literature, both rich and varied. The common man in the backwoods of the valley on the hills could embrace a simplified and democratized religion without having to be looked down upon by the high castes. This great religious movement and cultural revival brought about in new and comprehensive outlook on the life and distinctly healthy tone to social behaviour.

In the legacy of these saints and mystics, Bhima Bhoi is no doubt a descendant and a true mystic in santha tradition. Without entering into the pointless controversies on his birth and blindness, we may delve deep into his writings to ascertain his position as a mystic poet of high order.In 1862 he seems to have met Mahimā Gosāin, the founder of Mahimā Dharma. Mahimā Gosāin made this unsophisticated kandha boy conscious of his great poetic powers, and inspired him to compose and sing songs in praise of the Divine. This brought

about spiritual transformation in the life of this wonder boy ,who started composing a series of Bhajans of exquisite beauty and great charm. But in 1876, Mahimā Gosain's death was a great shock to Bhima Bhoi. In his Bhajans Bhima treated him as the anthropomorphic form of Śūnya *Brahma*. As a creative genius with profound religious and poetic inspiration he did not want to get bogged down in the dry, meaningless rituals and ceremonies of the faith. Instead he wanted to take up the essence of faith and depict it with artless emotive appeal to the common man. In the writings of Bhima Bhoi the concepts of Mahimā cult transformed from worthless celebration into emotional realisation and outpouring of the soul. Therefore, he was more popular among the rural folk than the urban people. There are two major exponents of Mahimā Dharma. It was left to Biswanāth Bābā to crystallize and record the philosophical and historical aspects of this cult and to Bhima Bhoi to reproduce it to give expression to its basic teachings through intense and piognant poetry. Without his poetry Mahima Dharma would have at most have at most an obscure and unappealing system of abstract ideas about the void entity and so on. It was in his philosophical ideas and concepts of Mahima cult found their way to the hearts of millions outburst of lyrical energy. We can refer to German scholar Eschmann to know the essence of Mahimā Dharma. She puts in this way, " Mahimā Dharma takes up the Buddhist concept of emptiness and identifies it with the Hindu conceptions of Param Brahma and Isvarapurusha. Śū*nya Param Brahma* is characterized more precisely with the concepts alekha(indescribable), nirguna (without attributes), nirakara(formless), anadi(eternal),niranjana (pure), and mahimā (radience, glory), all of which already appear in the mediaeval oriya literature for describing Śūnya Brahma or as synonyms for Him." [9]

Odia literature has a long history of referring to reality as the great void. Right from Sarala Dasa's *Mahābhārat* , a long chain of literary works including Balarama Das's *Brahm*āṇḍ*a Bhugola*, *Virāta Git*ā, Jagannāth Das's *Tul*ā *Bhi*ṇā, the writings of Achyutānanda, Dinakrushna and Arakhita Das and many other poets the supreme reality is delineated as one without form,

without end or beginning, without shape and without qualities. In *Sāralā Mahābhārata* there is a reference to Supreme Godhead in following lines:

"Jayatu Anādi Abhaya nirākāra
Aṇāhata purusha tu Aṇākāra jyoti."

(Victory to you, O Lord one without beginning, without shape and the fearless, Thou art the unmanifest *purusha*, the Light without shape)

Medieval mystics treated the concept of world not in the Buddhist sense of emptiness or absence, it was rather a presence a concrete identity the Alekha purusha, who was all powerful. In which number of example describe almost in identical manner as concept of this Alekha Purusha,

"His shape is one of total emptiness and yet He fills up the immense empty space with His being and that way He is omnipresent, emptiness is His house and He moves in all the spheres through this emptiness."

This tradition in the poetry of both of Ghana and media helped me find an even more pregnant expression in writings and his other Bhajanas he gave a powerful expression to not only domestic ideas of personal salvation but also to the redemption of man in society from his destiny. His poetry had not merely the meditative philosophical quality of security but it also brought to it the lyricism and musical quality which was associated with earlier poets like Gopalkrushna and Banamali. In extremely lyrical lines Bhima Bhoi brought the essence of the well-known Mahimā cult in celebrated lines. The poet was prepared to consign his soul to the hell if it could save humanity.

"Boundless is the anguish and misery of the living
Who can see it and tolerate
Let my soul be condemned to hell
But let the universe be redeemed."

There are three levels of prayers can be seen in *Stuti Chintamāṇi*: 1) Prayers where the thrust is to make ones miseries known to the Lord, and to communicate to Him own anguish. 2) Prayers

which sing about the Lord's supreme powers and his capacity to grant deliverance and 3) prayers which are in the nature of supplications for granting the minimum objectives desired by the devotee. In his preface to Stuti Chintamani professor Arta Ballava Mohanty went to the extend of comparing Bhima Bhoi to Jesus Christ. He was of the opinion that just as Jesus suffered crucification for the suffering humanity, Bhima's soul was ever on the cross suffering all the agony and all the anguish of a troubled soul seeking a better and purer life for himself and a better future for the whole of humanity."[10] Dr. Mayadhar Mansingh has compared him to early Christian Evangelists. It is true that in spite of his burning faith in a coming millennium where social tyrannies would end and a more egalitarian equitable religion oriented social order would prevail occasionally he seemed to be on the brink of despair and terrible mental agony . That however did not take away his faith than all this would one day end. In one of his Bhajanas he attacks this pervasive paganism all around.

The highest sense of altruism and mysticism reflected in a poem:

Sthāvaru jangama kitaru patanga chāhindele anusari
sakala ghatare puri samānare nohe sāna bada kari

From mobile to the motel from insects to birds wherever I look I find you inhabiting all the banks one cannot consider anyone small or big it is saved your near to those who call you with love. Thus was the life and thoughts of mystic poet Bhima Bhoi

We can conclude this discourse with the words of an eminent poet, scholar and biographer of Bhima Bhoi Dr.Sitakant Mahapatra, "in his writings we find strong element of his personal life and its struggles the inspiration he derived from his guru the dream like quality of the soul's dialogue with the infinite the full range of its anguish and ecstasy and all these expressed in a style and language which are easily understood by the man in the street".[11]

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Bhima Bhoi : The Saint-Poet and the Humanist

Bijayananda Singh

Bhima Bhoi, the saint-poet, was the embodiment of human thought, feeling, consciousness and above all the values. His whole life was devoted for the cause of humanity. The motto of his life was the welfare of all human beings. He could recognize the 'real self' in man. In fact, he is a rare personality. He is unique. According to him, man is the supreme of all creations, as the element of divinity is ingrained in him. But in certain situation, man, the son of God, turns into a demon. Human life is never smooth. One has to be careful in each step of his life. Sometimes, man becomes so cruel and hard-hearted that he behaves more than a beast. Bhima Bhoi realized the real existence of both the individual and the society. To lead the people in their right path, he has become a path-finder. A man, who loves his family, becomes a part and parcel of that family. Likewise, a man, who loves his village and society, is moved by the misery of his people. A man who loves his country, breaks down at the time of crisis in his country. But a man, who loves the whole world, all living beings, feels pain by the sorrows of any single living being. He sheds tears by empathizing other's agony. Bhima was the man who expressed his concern for the world. He deeply felt the perennial pain of others. He earnestly prayed to God to make the world free from sorrows and sufferings. The way he realized the misery of the world and reflected on the sufferings is found in his writings which is quite unique in the world literature.

Bhima Bhoi was a poet, religious preacher and social reformer. He was also a rebel. Though the society is formed for the well-being of the mankind, the so-called rules and regulations of the society caused suffering to the human beings. Bhima Bhoi faced the hard realities of life from his childhood. He was committed to the cause of truth.[1]

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1. S.C Panigrahi, Bhima Bhoi & Mahima Darshan (See the introduction), Santosh Publication, Cuttack.

"The Mahima Dharma is deeply rooted in the vedic religion. It has of course its own axe to grind. Though originated in the fertile soil of Orissan religious milieu, it is unique in its own way and offers a comprehensive view of theoretical metaphysics as well practical means to realize the goal envisaged in its blue-print. These moral practices can be grouped under the broad concept Sādhanā."

Bhima Bhoi had unique contribution to the propagation and popularization of the Dharma, as it is said that Mahimā Dharma is a new faith. This Dharma is otherwise call as mānavika dharma (religion of humanity). The chief objective of the dharma was *the welfare of all living beings*. Mahimā Dharma is against idol worship. Brahman, the creator, is truth. The creation, created by Brahman is also the truth. To redeem the world, Mahimā Dharma is a form of humanism. After knowing the social and religious system of the society, he accepted Mahimā Dharma as the ultimate way for the redemption of mankind. To him, the whole world and the entire human race both are created by one and the same Reality.

The pain of every human being touched Bhima Bhoi. His philosophy of life was full of humanistic values. That is why his tireless effort in form of writings and religious movement were filled with human feelings and sentiments. His heart has cried at the sight of the unlimited agony of the whole world. One cannot but cry at the plight of the others suffering when one loves so much his society. Bhima Bhoi writes:

"Panchavuta ātmā dagadhi heuchi jivana kānduchhi niti
Anyāya samsāra aniti āchāra dekhi kaliyuga riti"

(My soul is a flame and life cries all the time after witnessing injustice and anarchy as the principles of Kaliyuga)[2]

Bhima Bhoi was very empathetic and sensitive. His sentimental attitude has been reflected very well in his poetry. He has been moved by the suffering of the living beings. He writes:

"Eka khanda hāda buṇḍāe rudhira phute māunsa jāṇai
Tenukari sinā prāninka bikala sahi na pārai muhin"

2. Karunakara Sahoo, *Bhima Bhoi Granthābali, 35 boli,* Dharmagrantha Store, Cuttack.

(My blood boils at the sight of the oppressed. I feel hurt if anybody hurts the other.)[3]

Bhima Bhoi raised voice against casteism and he advocated for a casteless society. His words are candid, lucid and simple which touched human minds. He says that if you search for caste, you cannot gate liberation and if you aspire for liberation don't search for caste.

*"Jāti khojile mukti nāhin
Mukti khojile jāti nāhin"*

He further explains,

*"Ki abā brāhmana ki abā cāṇḍāla anya na dhariba chitte
Jāti gotrahin no pachāriba kichhi hānilāva jāna jete
Kichhi tāhāra manare na dhariba ucha niche boli kari
Gruha dharma bidhi emanta prakāra satya dharma jānti tari."*

(Don't discriminate between Brahmin and Chandala (low born man) or high and low. This is the law of household. People get redeemed for their truth and devotion.)[4] *(Stuti Chintamāṇi)*

Bhima has paid attention to social problems. He has also given a new vision to the society. He aspires for an ideal society. Pride and violence destroy human beings. Silence is the centre of human peace and happiness.

*"Para dārā chori mithyā nadhara manare
Hiṁsā ahankāra chhanda nibāra durare
Kuta kapata khachaku na rakha pāsare
Kāma krodho teji sahijaho maunare"*

(Avoid wife of others, theft and lie. Maintain distance from the wicked. Give up desire and anger and maintain silence.)[5] *(Bhajanamālā)*

He vehemently opposed idol-worship. *Śūnya* is the source of all creations. To establish this truth, he writes:

*"Manusya hoi nirjiba sange bhāba dekhate kede ajana
Sunyaru yehu pindaprana gadila nahin taku anumana"*

3. Ibid 27 boli.
4. Ibid.
5. Bhima Bhoi, *Bhajanamālā*, p-20.

(Being a man he keeps relationship with lifeless. He does not know that he has come from space)[6]

(Stuti Chintamani)

Bhima Bhoi points out that human body is valuable as it is the gateway for liberation.

"Durlabha samsara manushya sarira deha bahi narakhara
Khanda dei tumbhe bhanduachha mote he anadi yogeswara"

(Human body is most precious. But O God, you are cheating me by giving me a piece of sweet.)[7]

He is very conscious of human goal and the means to the end. He was the chief exponent of truth. Man can derive real happiness by following the path of truth. Lie is antidote of human ideology. Which is the cause of his destruction. He writes:

"Michha tharu bada pātaka nāhin na danadyanare napade
Ati aprema e asatya kahile kula sansāra hin bude'

× × ×

Satyare shoiba satyare basiba satya kari Fandā brutti
Mahima bhajiba lokamāne jete kara ehi dharma kirti
Satyara kahiba satya kahithiba satyare jiba āsiba
Satya karmare jete kiratimāna yuga yuga rahithiba
Dosa aparādha nahi lāva jete gurunku kahibe sabu
Kapata nakarina no kahiba kebe abasya dandibe prabhu."

(The devotees of Mahima dharma should stick to truth. Achievement on the basic of truth lasts long.)[8]

In fact, Bhima Bhoi was a revolutionary. His contemporary society was full of orthodox tradition, injustice and blind beliefs. The Brahmin dominated society and tortured the rest of the society. But Bhima Bhoi was fearless and courageous. For the welfare of the society, he rebelled against the Brahminical society without paying any heed to his life. He revolted against idol-worship, casteism. It is a matter of great surprise to know the relevance of Bhima Bhoi's writings in his contemporary society. His poetry was spontaneous. It was a sign of his nobel heart and mind. His heart

6. Bhima Bhoi, *Stuti chintāmaṇi.*
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.

was innocent and emotional. Such a great poet is unique in any other language of the world. He did not write poetry for the sake of literature. He has written what he felt for the society. He wanted to lead the people on the right track. He put emphasis on human values though he was deeply engrossed in crises. So, Mayadhar Mansingh, another great Odia poet writes on Bhima Bhoi.

"He (Bhima Bhoi) was a great propagandist of a new religion whose devotees were large in number both in and outside Odisha. That religion touched this blind and illiterate man which transformed him to a great poet."[9]

Bhima Bhoi always paid attention to the human race. The chief objective of his religion was the development of inner self. Peace of mind was the message of this religion. He sacrificed his life for the sake of happiness of human beings. He takes the world in a humanitarian point of view. He made an effort to provide the basic requirements of life. He wanted a metamorphosis of the whole society. According to Bhima Bhoi God, society and religion are interlinked.

Bhima Bhoi was a spiritual poet in Odia literature. *"He was the harbinger of modern Odia poetry. He recited for the universal consciousness. He did not find any discrimination of religion, caste and creed in his writings. He not only loved human beings but also he loved 56 crore animals."*[10]

He has overcome all the social barriers of his time and has dazzled like a gold. He has been ashore by going through reverse current of his life.

"Bhima Bhoi caught hold of his motherland and soul. He also felt that the entire animal race belonged to him. He put equal emphasis on society and spirituality. He wrote from the high philosophy and mixed it with the emotion and felling of the common man. His writings are an amalgamation of literature, scriptures and folk-literature. In this context he is unique and extraordinary."[11]

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9. Mayadhara Mansinha, *Manasingha Granthabali* (Section -4).
10. Srinibas Udgata, *Konarka* (1996) 102 Issue (see the editorial).
11. Madhusudan Pati, *Stuti chintāmaṇi* of Kabi Bhima Bhoi, *Konarka* (1996) 102 Issue.

It is not only his poetry, his vision of life, human consciousness and above all his attitude to life is also unique. It is really surprising to know that such a man was born. Bhima Bhoi was worried for the inexplicable suffering of the common man. He had prayed Alekha Brahma to relieve people from suffering and at the same time has appealed to people to do good deeds. This appeal to God and people is completely novel in Odia literature. To him God is all-pervasive. We find a similar approach in the philosophy of Spinoza where the nature is identified with God and *vice-versa. (Natura Naturata, Natura Naturans)*

He Writes:

> *"Sthābara jangama kitaru patanga chahin dele anusari*
> *Sakala ghatare puri samānare nohe sana bada kari"*

(You are filled with all living creature-even with tiny insects – equally with all; not more and not less.)[12]

In Bhima Bhoi's writings we find a beautiful amalgamation of wisdom, consciousness and experience. Relation inside home is very sentimental. Relation at home is completely familiar, spiritual and cordial. Bhima Bhoi realized this aspect of life. So, it is concluded from his writings that he had emotional and spiritual relationship with all the people of the world. That is why he imagines the whole world to be a family. A similar line of thought is found in Vedāntic View i.e. *Basudhaiba Kutumbakam.* The entire universe is but a family. This type of view is oriented towards the universe:

> *"Brahmāndaku kariachha ghare bakhāni"*

(You have transformed the whole world into a quarter)[13]

His cosmopolitan outlook is a sign of new thought. Bhima Bhoi was successful in his attempt and would remain the champion for the cause of humanism for all time to come.

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12. Bhima Bhoi, *Stuti chintāmaṇi.*
13. Ibid.

Bhīma Bhoi's Philosophical Approaches to Śūnyatā

Jhadeswar Ghosh

The paper claims that Bhīma Bhoi's empathetic attitude towards the sorrow and suffering of the underprivileged beings of the society and his conception of śūnyatā are in perfect harmony with each other. There is no contradiction between the social theory and the notion of void. Rather, they play complementary roles in the philosophy of *Alekha* Mahimā Dharma. Śūnyatā is the most important concept used in Indian tradition and has been interpreted in various ways. In one way, it is used as describing the nature of the world, which is said to be empty in the sense that the world is meaningless or an illusion or māyā, which an Advaitin believes. In another way, śūnyatā is a special state of mind that one can achieve through meditation as the Mahāyana Buddhists believe that everything one encounters in life is empty of the absolute identity, permanence or an indwelling self. It is because that they relate śūnyatā to *anattā* and *pratītyasamutpāda*, which discards the existence of the self. Bhīma Bhoi was an Oriya saint-poet and leading exponent of Mahimā Dharma of the nineteenth century. His contribution is remarkable that he is a creative social thinker and subscribes significantly to the Advaita view of Vedānta on the one hand and Mādhyamika Śūnyavāda on the other and goes beyond.

I

Bhīma Bhoi was a leading Oriya saint-poet of the nineteenth century whose universalism and humanism left a deep impression on the followers of the faith. We know about the philosophy and poetry of Bhīma Bhoi but it is difficult to have a thoroughgoing account of the life-history of Bhīma Bhoi.[1] We do not know for certain when and where he was born, who his parents were, his early education etc. However, it is clear from his writings that he belonged to the indigenous family known as

Kandha. The village culture of Odisha which was encouraged in the *Bhagavat Tungis*[2] stimulated Bhīma Bhoi to open his creative thinking. It was, so to say, the spiritual and cultural atmospheres of the *Bhāgavat Tungis* developed the literary acumen and metaphysical insight of Bhīma Bhoi. He has conveyed his thoughts in the form of poems especially as *bhajans* (prayers). At an early stage of his poetic life, he started composing *bhajans* the first of which is said to be *vandanā pāda padmaku, dhyāyi guru payaraku.*[3] In his locality Bhīma Bhoi had already gathered popularity as a spiritual singer and composer before his initiation to *Mahimā dharma*. Bhīma Bhoi's literary canon is prolific. His important works, comprising *Stuti Chintāmani, Bhajana Mālā, Brahma Nirupaṇa Gitā,* Ādi-*Anta Gitā, Aṣṭaka Bihāri Gitā, Cautiśā Mālā, Nirveda Sādhana, Sṛuti Niṣedha Gitā, Manu Sabhā Maṇḍala, Padma Kalpa, Brahmchaḷka, Purna Samhiṭā, Brahma Sanjukta Gitā, Navin Bihāri Gitā, Ahimsā Dharma Brahma Gitā, Kaḷi Yuga Gitā* and others.

At a very young age, Bhīma Bhoi was initiated to the faith of Mahimā Dharma by Mahimā Gosāin, the founder of the faith. According to him, Mahima, who is *alekha* or indescribable, Mahima is also the master (*swāmi*) and divine teacher (*gurudeva*). The *santhas* of odisha were mainly concerned in realistic philosophy that could offer focus to a society, torn apart in the name of religion dominant at that time. To begin with, let us discuss the historical perspectives of the movement. It was a period of passage from medieval to modern times in the history of India as well as Odisha. The beginning of this movement can be assigned to various factors underlying socio-economic and cultural life predominant at that time. The widespread corruptions, malpractices, oppression destabilized the society and further compartmentalized the caste and class ridden society. The myopic policies of the rulers both native and foreign dampen the spirit of freedom and progress of the people. In this hour of crisis all round confusion, the Mahimā Movement was initiated by the illustrious *Mahimā Gosain* with the sole purpose of restoring truth, non-violence, equality and justice in the society. He preached in a lucid manner the various concepts of śūnya, mukti, ahiṁsā etc., which formed

the philosophy of Mahimā Dharma. The early life of Mahimā Gosain is still covered in obscurity. History depicts, in 1828 AD a man probably known as Mukunda Das came to Kapilas and initiated practised yoga. Later he came to be known as Mahimā Gosain. In 1872 Mahimā Gosain started spreading his spiritual and social philosophy in different parts of Odisha. 'Mahimā Goswami' the founder, preceptor, exponent and guru of the Mahimā Dharma is Mahima, Mahimā Gosāin and no other name. The hereditary *gurubād* and also guru in flesh and blood has been done away with. Mahimā *mahā brahma* is beyond all names, forms, attributes. He is primordial (*Adi*), eternal, true (*satya* and *sanatan*). He is beyond all stages of life, natural to the homo sapiens. As such all creations emerge from him, and he is therefore *Ajoni-sambhut* (*Nāhi tānk tāta māta, sarve tānkthāru jāta*).[4] The philosophy of Mahimā Dharma has been beautifully and lucidly described by *Santha Kabi* Bhīma Bhoi whose writings are available for the study of this religion. In his innumerable writings he demonstrated the passionate cry of the common people for their birthright i.e., equality, fraternity and social justice in the society. Many thinkers say that the history of Mohimā Movement will be incomplete without *Santha Kabi* Bhīma Bhoi. The illustrious Mahimā *sanyāsi* like *Abadhuta* Biswanāth Bābā and Mahindra Bābā have contributed to promote study of this religion. The first official history of Mahimā Dharma was written by Biswanāth Bābā.[5] The household devotees like Nāran Sahu, Arta Ballav Mahanty, Ratnakar Pati, Mayadhar Mansingh, Satrughna Nath, Sarbeswar Das, Chitaranjan Das, A. Eschmann, Nilamani Senapati, Harihar Patel and others have led the spirit of Mahimā Dharma. Bhīma Bhoi's poems and *bhajanas* unambiguously symbolize the models of profound schools of thought. As Mahimā Swāmi had not written or composed any of his ideologies concerning the faith of him, it was Bhīma Bhoi who carried out the unrealized tasks of his master. He demonstrates a unique synthesis of *jñāna*, *karma* and *bhakti* attaining in the actualization of the absolute thought as *Mahimā* and Śūnya. He did not write poetry for the sake of literature. He has written that he felt the sorrow and suffering of the underprivileged people of that period.

II

The Mahimā Dharma was a socio-religious movement. Bhīma Bhoi can certainly be placed as one of the most productive social thinkers of all times. He was an advocate of a society based on equality. He commented all kinds of discrimination based on caste, class, creed and gender. In fact, he gave a very inspired attitude to women and indicated that women should be the educators of men.[6] In this Dharma, the common human being is the main concern. A man belonging to any category is admitted to the Mahimā faith for the purpose of realization and prayer of Brahma for a simple and sacred life. In course of time, however, the movement spread far and wide towards the tribal regions of Madhya Pradesh, Assam, West Bengal and Bihar.[7] Like all other religious reform movements of the time, it emerged as a reactionary movement against orthodox Hinduism. The *Mahimā Dharma* had revolted against Hindu idol worship, against the age long caste society and against the surpassing rich people. The sole purpose of the movement is to re-establish the much-needed equality, truth and justice in the society. The teachings were simple and apprehensible by the rural people. Āsramas and *tungis* were built to accommodate the *sādhus*, and *sanyāsis*. *Mandiras* such as the *Dhuni Mandira* (fire temple), Śūnya *Mandira* (empty temples) were built. Rules, regulations, *ritis*, *nitis*, have come into existence with the coming up of these *Mandiras*. All system of Indian Philosophy contains a practical aspect called *sādhanā*. They exercise truth, non-violence and believe in one God and one caste. For Mahimites the religion is not to be advocated but applied. The followers should avoid falsehood, egoism and do practice non-violence, truthfulness, kindness, peace, simplicity, forgiveness and control of six-passion like lust, anger, covetousness, fascination, pride, spite. They should not use luxurious and expansible beds for comfortable sleep. They should dedicate themselves to *Param-brahma* in body, mind and words. Bhīma Bhoi became the spokesman and exponent of philosophy. The devotional appealing prayer poems composed by Bhīma Bhoi are greatly responsible for the spread of *Mahimā Dharma*. In one *bhajana* he says: [In one *rāga* I composed four songs. I am the helpless Bhīma, but my Guru is all-powerful, under his

fearless banner I have taken shelter and drink the nectar from his feet. With his grace I see the inner and outer reality with the eyes of knowledge.][9] It is significant to note that the term '*Mahimā*' and '*Brahma*' are synonymously used in the *Mahimā* literature. The ultimate reality is addressed as *Mahimā. Alekha* is significant in the nature of *Mahimā. Alekha* literally means something which does not have a fixed contour or determinate form. *Mahimā* and *Alekha* are the denotative and connotative aspects of one and the same reality.[10] The holy phrase '*Mahimā Alekha*' which is accorded as the status of mantra in the system contains the essence of the system. In fact, it was a most revolutionary movement that attempted to liberate the down-trodden men and women from the bondage of superstitious beliefs and traditions, ritualistic idolatry and predominance of priests.

III

Bhīma Bhoi's social theory had a close connection with his metaphysical concept of śūnya or void. The etymological meaning of the word śūnya means its preferred translation is "void". The English dictionary will depict that the word "void" means "empty", "unoccupied", "containing nothing", etc. In the Indian philosophical tradition neither the orthodox tradition (āśtika) nor the heterodox (*nāstika*) tradition applies the term with such sense.[11] Thus, the term śūnya is not entirely negative in its implication. The term śūnya is variously interpreted. To some it means nothingness, to others a permanent principle, transcendent and indefinable, immanent in all things. Thus, the term śūnya is not entirely negative in its implication. Bhīma Bhoi's teaching of śūnyatā never conveys *nihilism*. It should be noted that the exact meaning of śūnyatā varies which can lead to confusion. But *Alekha's* śūnyatā is quite different. In a sense, it is partly closer to *Advaita* and partly closer to the Buddhist. It is rather similar to Einstein's theory of relativity. Śūnyatā can exist only when there is something to contain. There can't be either state without the existence of the glass. But what would happen, if the glass is destroyed? Similar is the case with *Alekha* philosophy. Bhīma Bhoi does not want to destroy the 'glass'. In his conception, śūnya

Brahma is also a *purna Brahma*. Śūnyatā is an important Buddhist teaching which claims that nothing possesses essential nature or *svabhāva*, enduring identity because everything is interconnected in a chain of co-becoming and in a state of constant flux. All things being impermanent, nothing can be seen as having an independent, lasting form of existence. It is interesting to note that Sankara's theory of *Brahman*, which comes closest to Nāgārjuna's philosophy of śūnya. Śūnya, as per Nāgārjuna's theory, stands for ultimate Reality (*tattva*). While defining *tattva* he ascribes to it certain characteristics, which do not allow us to be convinced that the word śūnya means total annihilation, as interpreted by Śaṅkara. According to Nāgārjuna, śūnya is a principle about which neither existence nor nonexistence, nor a combination of both, nor the negation of both, can be predicated. In other words, it is an indeterminate, ineffable and non-describable principle. Śaṅkara too interprets *Brahman* as indescribable (*avyakta*) and *nirguna* (transcending determination through ascription of qualities) and *nirvikalpa* (beyond concepts). He claims that the essence of humanism lies in the essence of the human being. In the *Stutichintāmani*, Bhīma Bhoi has emphasized that śūnya does not appear as absolute emptiness, as can be seen in the following lines.

We do not pay attention to the one
Who made this body and breath out of void,
(*śūnyaru yehu piṇḍa gadhila nāhi tāku anumāna.*) 95.15

In the above line Bhima Bhoi is clearly describing that void is not absolute emptiness. The ultimate Brahman is referred to as "dweller in the void" or śūnya*vāsi*. He has a body which is empty. This body is called śūnya*māyā deha*. It is the ultimate reality. It is the ultimate end and beginning of everything. The ultimate being infinite cannot be known by the finite intellect. According to Bhīma Bhoi, the śūnya owes its origin to the potency of the nameless entity, i.e., *alekha* or *anāma*. In *Mahimā* philosophy *Mahimā Gosain* is accepted as the incarnation of śūnya or *alekha*. When there was nothing there was only śūnya. It is beyond all kinds of descriptions. But it is the source of all existence. Śūnya also has an ontological sense in *Mahimā* metaphysics.

IV

The primary aim which stands out in and through the writings of the philosopher-poet Bhima Bhoi is his utter concern and empathy for the fellow men and passionate eagerness to help them come out of the state of decadence and suffering. In this movement the common human being is the main concern. Unlike other religions, it is not so much God-centric but humano-centric. In his philosophy we find that the theology of the God is substituted by the new theology of the God *Alekha* (śūnya), the formless who descends in human form to help the impermeable declining human society to move the path of dharma. The śūnya owes its origin to the potency of the nameless entity, i.e., *alekha* or *anāma*. It admits that the world is a real creation of Him, through Him (*Mahimā*).

According to Bhima Bhoi, empirical knowledge and the practice of rites and rituals are not the paths of salvation. *jñāna*, *karma* and *bhakti* known as the golden path to the realization of the Brahman (śūnya). Being a part of the bhakti movement the *santha* philosophers referred directly or indirectly to a God as śūnya that could be an object of highest love and devotion. Salvation for him meant a life of perfection. He did not seek for a *vedāntic mukti* of losing one's identity. Bhima Bhoi encourages his followers to follow the tents of *yama* and *niyama*. One must abandon *kāma* and *moha* as it images the very purpose of *sādhanā*. Here to say that Bhima Bhoi's humanism surpasses man does not imply that it is transcendental – rather it means removal of ignorance and search for the innate divinity. Bhima Bhoi's verses resound with this oneness and uniqueness of *Alekha:*

> He is neither the teacher nor the disciple;
> no master nor slave has He,
> Neither a Brahman, nor an infidel, He is the greatest of all.
> He belongs to no tribe, casteless, He is the most blameless,
> The two rule the world as one mind and one soul.[14]

The above discussion revealed that Bhīma Bhoi is a far more radical, original and the most creative social thinker of all times.

Notes and References :

1. For the discussion on the life and philosophy of Bhīma Bhoi, see S. C. Panigrahi, *Bhima Bhoi and Mahimā Darsana*, Santosh Publication, 1998 and also, I have done some research on Bhīma Bhoi's notion of Śūnyatā,

2. The *Odiya Bhagavata* of the saint-poet Jagannath Dash which was read recited and discussed by the villagers every evening in the *Tungis* in a peaceful atmosphere was a great source of inspiration for Bhima Bhoi.

3. S. C. Panigrahi, *Bhima Bhoi and Mahima Darsana*, Santosh Publication, Cuttack in the collaboration with P.G. Department of Philosophy, Utkal University, 1998; I have slightly modified the translation.

4. Number of scholars who have worked on the Mahimā movement concentrate on its religious point of view. This includes A Eschmann, "*Mahimā Dharma: An Autochthonous Hindu Reform Movement*" in A Eschmann, H Kulke and G C Tripathy (ed.), *The Cult of Jagannatha and the Regional Tradition of Orissa* (New Delhi: Manohar), 1978, 375-410; Ishita Banerjee Dube and Johannes Beltz (ed.), *Popular Religion and Ascetic Practices: New Studies on Mahimā Dharma* (New Delhi: Manohar), 2008.

5. Priyadarshi Bahinipati, *The Mahimā Dharma: Interpreting History, Trends and Tradition*, Gyanajuga Publication, Bhubaneswar, 2009, p. 45.

6. The age of truth will come back
   When women impart knowledge to men.
   and see the discussion of Manorama Tripathy, The Meaning of Apocalypse in Bhīma Bhoi's "*Stutichintāmaṇi*" *Indian Literature*, March/April 2013, Vol. 57, No. 2 (274) (March/ April 2013), Sahitya Akademi, pp. 202-210.

7. For details see Priyadarshi Bahinipati, The Mahimā Dharma: Its Peregrination in the Twentieth Century, *Search*, DDCE, Utkal University, Vol. 1, January, 2013.

8. For detail discussion see G. P. Das, Mahimā Dharma: A Revolutionary Religious Movement and S. C. Panigrahi, Bhīma Bhoi and Mahima Darshana, *The Philosophy of Bhīma Bhoi & Mahimā Dharma*, KISS Deemed to be University, 2020, edited by Harischandra Sahoo.
9. Trns. Sitakanta Mohapatra – "Saint-poet Bhīma Bhoi an Assessment," in *Santh Kavi Bhima Bhoi*-All Orissa Adivasi Cultural Association, 1996, p. 2 (English section).
10. For this discussion see S. C. Panigrahi's *"Bhima Bhoi and Mahimā Darsana"*.
11. For the etymological meaning and philosophical discussion of the term śūnya, see Tandra Patnaik, Śūnya *Puruṣa: Bauddha Vaiṣṇavism of Orissa*, D. K. Printworld, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 103-15. And also see the discussion of D. M. Praharaj, Vedantic Tradition and Mahimā Cult, *The Philosophy of Bhīma Bhoi & Mahimā Dharma*, KISS Deemed to be University, 2020, edited by Harischandra Sahoo.
12. For the detailed discussion see S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy* (1923) Vol. I, Oxford University Press.
13. Bhima Bhoi, *Stutichintāmaṇi*,
    Prāninka ārata dukha apramita dekhu dekhu kevā sahu, mojibana pachhe narke padithāu, jagata uddhāra heu.
14. *Stutichintāmaṇi*, 36.
    'nuhanti se guru nuhanti se siṣya.

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Ganesh Prasad Das retired from P.G. Dept. of Philosophy, Utkal University as Professor and Head of the Department. He is the author of many books like, *Vedanta Paribhasa, Basics of Logic (PartI & II), Co-edited Darsanika Ganeswar Mishra (O).* He was the General President of Indian Philosophical Congress and at present he is the Vice-President of All Odisha Philosophy Association.

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Sarat Chandra Panigrahi retired from Utkal University as Professor and Head. P. G Deptt. Of Philosophy. He is a well-known figure in the academic circle as a prolific writer and a teacher par excellence. He is the author of many books like; *Self-knowledge, Issues in Indian Ethics, Bhima Bhoi and Mahima Darsana, Concept of Yoga in Bhavavad Gita, The Philosophy of Bhagavad Gita, Life and works of Gautam Buddha (O), Life and works of Mahabir Jaina (O), Guru Nanak Jibana O Darshana (O) and Drusti Darsanare Kabir Gatha (O).* At present he is working as Professor Emeritus in KISS Deemed to be University.

Mukti Lakhi Mangaharam graduated from York University, London. She had M.phil Degree in 2006 from Cambridge University on *Criticism & Culture.* She was awarded Ph.D in the year 2011 from Cornel University, America on *Bhakti Literature.* At present, she is Associate Professor in Comparative Literature, Department of English in Rutgers University, New Brunswick, USA.

Anjali Mohapatra, formerly Head of Department of Philosophy, Ravenshaw (A) College, Cuttack has retired from Govt. Service (College Branch) as OES(I). Her works include: *Srimad Bhgavata of Jagannatha Dasa : A Philosophical Perspective* and *The Concept of Action and Agent in Gita.*

Fanindam Deo, formerly Principal of Khariar Autonomous College, Khariar, Nuapada is a well-known researcher in the field of social science and author of books like *Roots of Proverty (2009)* and *Socio-Religious Movements & Cultural Networks in Indian Civilisation : Mahima Dharma (2015)*, Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla.

Basanta kumar Panda (1955) is at present working as Director,Centre of Excellence for Studies in Classical Odia, (Ministry of Education,Govt.of India), Bhubaneswar. He was former Professor of Odia Language, Regional Institute of Education (NCERT), Bhubaneswar. His books ; *Nisarga Niranjana*, (Ph.D. work) 1995, *Kabya Jijnasa 1995*, *Rabindranath Tagore 1999*, *Ratha Saptaka (Trs) 2003*, and *Manaswi Gopabandhu:*

Sikhya O Sahitya 2021 are worth-mentioning . He has bagged many awards and honours like; National Award for Excellence in Odia Language by Akhil Bharatiya Sahitya Parisad 2006, honoured by Utkal Sammilani (2014), Utkala Sahitya Samaj 2018 and Gokarnika Sahitya Samaj 2018 etc.

Bijayananda Singh, the Chair professor of Gopabandhu Research Chair in KISS Deemed to be University, Bhubaneswar is an active organizer in the field of Odia Language and Literature. He is the Convenor of Odia Advisory Board, Sahitya Academy, New Delhi. To his credit he has published more than fifty five books in Odia Language, to quote a few: *Faturanandanka Sahityare Hashya, Manaswi Gadya srastā Pyarimohan, Bhinna Bhumi, Samparka O Samikhya, Samaya O Samalochana etc.* Recently, he has been awarded Kabi Brajanath Ratha Smruti Samman 2022 and Utkal Gourava Madhusudan Smruti Samman (2022).

Jhadeswar Ghosh is at present Professor & Head, Department of Philosophy, University of Gour Banga. Author of *Naturalized Semantics: A Critical Analysis of Quine's Philosophy* (2013), *From Meaning Atomism to Meaning Holism: A Study of Bhartṛhari, Wittgenstein and Quine* (2021). His areas of interest include Philosophy of Language (Indian and Western), Analytical Philosophy.



Śūnya Mandir at Joranda (Dhenkanal)



Lamp Stand in Magha Purnima



A Saint Pouring ghee in earthen lamps (Jhāda)



Mahima Dhuni for the World-Peace (Refer to page 51)



A view of Khallipalli Ashram



Prof. Ishita Banerjee-Dube sharing her research experience with Dr. Pradip Panda, Dr. Fanindam Deo & Dr. Harischandra Sahoo in Khalliapalli Ashram on 11.02.2022.



Bhima Bhoi Statue at Gopa-Madhupur
(The village claimed to be his Birth Place)

Source: Author, Digitized by PPRACHIN, SOA



Restoration of the Well (Near Kandhara, Rairakhol)

THE EDITOR



The editor of the present Volume, **Dr. Harischandra Sahoo** is at present working as Professor of Bhima Bhoi Research Chair of Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS) Deemed to be University, Bhubaneswar. He has served for 37 years as a teacher of Philosophy in different Government Colleges of the State of Odisha including Ravenshaw, Gangadhar Meher and B.J.B College. He has obtained Ph.D from Utkal University and supervised research scholars. He has participated in several State-level, National-level, International Seminars and Conferences. From among his publications, books like *Dream & Sleep: A Study in Philosophy of Mind, Contemporary Indian Philosophy (ed.), Ethics: Theory and Practice (ed.), An Introduction to Practical Ethics (ed.)* and *The Philosophy of Bhima Bhoi and Mahima Dharma (ed.)* are worth mentioning. He takes interest in fields like Analytical Philosophy, Philosophy of Mind, Moral Philosophy and Practical Ethics.

THE BOOK

The present anthology *"Philosophical Reflections on Bhima Bhoi and Mahima Dharma"* is a collection of insightful articles by eminent scholars focussing on various aspects of Philosophy of Bhima Bhoi. The articles also highlight the vision of the saint-philosopher and hint at the spiritual humanism of Bhima Bhoi which has been discussed by pointing out the similarity found in philosophy of Kabir, Achyutananda and Vivekananda etc.. Thus one can discern in the writings of Bhima Bhoi a definite metaphysics, a religious perspective, a moral paradigm with a social outlook.



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